

Chilean Syrah

From a standing start, Syrah has made it to number six in Chile's wine pop charts in less than 20 years. And this could be just the beginning, says Peter Richards MW

THE STORY OF Syrah in Chile is not a straightforward one. It's a tale still in the telling, with a murky past, highs and lows, capped by an uncertain future trajectory. This makes it intriguing, especially given that for some time it has been generating a good deal of excitement among wine lovers in the know. The key thing is that there are many – from drinkers to producers and wine critics alike – who hope that this is one saga with a happy ending.

The history of Syrah in Chile is a matter of debate. Records suggest it may have arrived as early as the first half of the 19th century, in the Quinta Normal nursery project in Santiago. Its commercial origins in the country, however, are most commonly attributed to Alejandro Dussailant, a French immigrant who arrived in Chile in 1874 and planted vineyards in the Curicó region which included 'gross Syrah'. (Though this could equally have been the aromatic Savoie variety Mondeuse Noire, which goes under this epithet and, according to *Wine Grapes*, is a close relative of Syrah.)

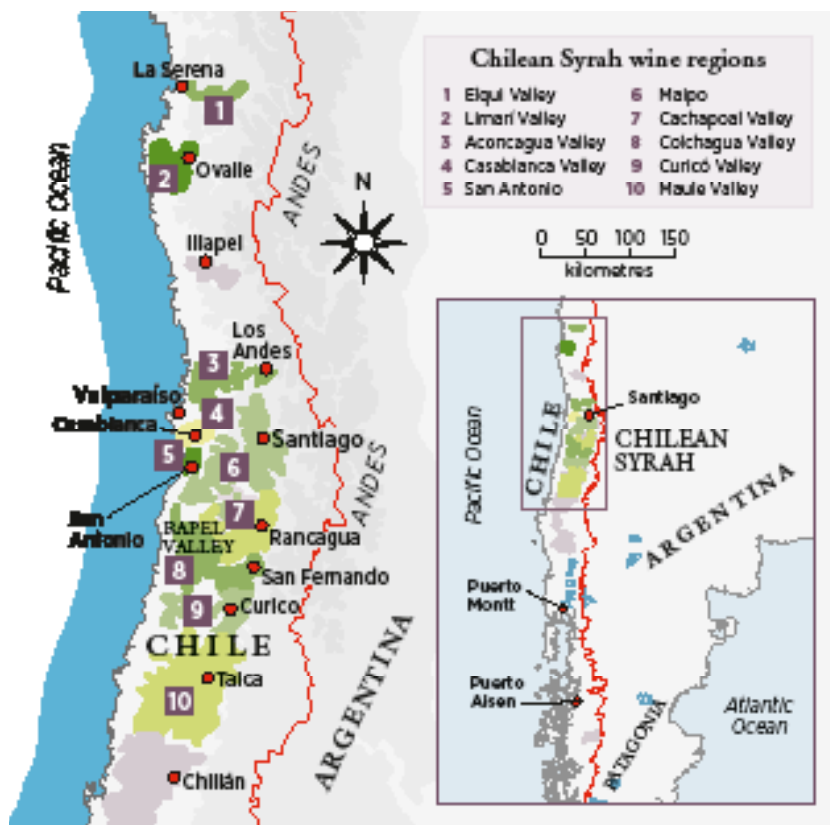
Either way, by the early 1990s there was scant trace of Syrah in Chile, the theory being that, even if it had been there, it was lost in the agrarian reforms of the 1970s. This started to change in the mid-1990s. Although importing vine stock into Chile is notoriously difficult due to stringent quarantine laws, forward-thinking producers began to look for new varieties to work with – and Syrah fitted the bill.

Rapid growth

Fundación Chile, a now defunct state-backed enterprise, was one of the first to import Syrah clones. So too was Aconcagua-based Errázuriz, which planted them on hillsides with new drip irrigation systems and received plaudits for its debut Syrah Reserva 1996. Since then, Syrah plantings have grown rapidly. From the first 19 hectares registered in 1996, plantings reached 2,197ha in 2001, and 5,391 ha in 2008, over 5% of the national vineyard. Now Chile's sixth most planted variety, its growth remains strong (increasing more than 28% between 2009 and 2012) while other key varieties are stable (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot), in decline (Chardonnay), or growing less markedly (Sauvignon Blanc, Carmenere).

This expansion is reflected in the growing range of styles that Chilean Syrah now offers. In the north, Elqui gives a distinctive peppery, meaty, olive character reminiscent of the northern Rhône, while Limarí is more about sleek blue and black fruit with floral hints and a generous flavour and texture. Coastal styles are particularly engaging, from the fleshy yet savoury norm of San Antonio (a region with significant diversity within it) to the wild herbs and gutsy fruit of Casablanca. Maipo has a natural generosity allied to a characteristically firm structure. Rapel tends to deliver a riper, lusher style, while Maule reverts to a tangier but still plush mode. The mountainous east and far south are still to be meaningfully explored for Syrah but could provide yet more nuance to this picture.

There is a school of thought suggesting such diversity risks causing confusion in what is an emergent category. This may be true. However, such diversity also neatly illustrates the potential for this naturally protean variety to thrive in a landscape of bright sunshine and degraded granite hillsides – and to satisfy many different market tastes in the process. Chile's enviable reputation for



Chilean Syrah: know your vintages

2013 Late spring rain complicated a long, cool vintage: bright, fresh wines, variable in quality but some stand-outs.

2012 A hot vintage that cooled down later on. Drink sooner not later.

2011 A long, dry vintage well suited to Syrah. Some outstanding wines were made.

2010 The earthquake vintage: cool and dry, with some wonderfully fresh and elegantly delineated wines that are ageing well.

2009 Warm vintage gave rich, ripe reds, many of which need drinking up now.

2008 Early-drinking with notable successes.

delivering value – clearly evident in many of its Syrah wines – also works in its favour when convincing drinkers to try something new. It may not be the easiest sell but the quality, diversity and value undoubtedly available make it a category that merits attention, patience and support.

The 2010 and 2011 vintages look to have produced some of Chile's finest Syrahs yet, many of which are well worth snapping up before they become more celebrated (and pricey). They bode well for the future.

Chilean Syrah: the facts

Total vineyard area 128,638ha

Syrah plantings 6%, 7,745ha

Syrah's ranked position in Chilean wine varieties Sixth, behind Cabernet Sauvignon, Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot, Chardonnay, Carmenere

Syrah in Chile's key regions

Elqui 116ha, Limarí 399ha, Aconcagua 250ha, Casablanca 147ha, San Antonio 107ha, Maipo 1,140ha, Cachapoal 845ha, Colchagua 2,31 ha, Curicó 534ha, Maule 1,732ha

(Source: SAG Catastro Vitícola Nacional 2012 & Origo Chilean Wine Regions Map 2014)

DWWA Regional Chair for Chile, Peter Richards MW, recently published his Chile Wine Brief 2013 (available from www.susieandpeter.com) ➤

The results

A consistently strong tasting provided evidence of the variety of styles emerging, with our judges relishing recent improvements and looking forward to further experimentation, says Mark O’Halleron

‘CHILEAN SYRAH HAS a clean bill of health,’ declared Dirceu Vianna Jr MW, when reflecting on this tasting; however, there was a caveat: ‘If you dig a little deeper, though, I would have a problem defining Chilean Syrah if asked. The positive is the diversity of regional styles, but it’s quite difficult to choose what to recommend to someone because the styles are so different; it’s a bit muddled.’

‘I definitely saw differences between the regions,’ agreed Patricio Tapia. ‘We all concur that Syrah from the north – Limarí, Choapa, Elqui – tastes different from Casablanca or San Antonio, which in turn tastes different from Colchagua or Cachapoal; there is definite regional character.’

‘Are all these different styles a good or a bad thing?’ questioned Peter Richards MW. ‘I’d argue it’s a good thing, although it doesn’t make things easier to understand. Where I’m less sure is when we get into the warmer heartlands of Colchagua and Cachapoal. I think there is clearly a place in the market for these easier, more generous styles, but I don’t see it being done particularly well at the moment, and I’m confused because when I taste these styles, a lot are extracted or alcoholic, which is not what good commercial Syrah or Shiraz should be about; it should

‘Syrah can and should be Chile’s best red grape, but it will need people to support it’

Peter Richards MW

be something that’s gently bittersweet and savoury, and should slip down easy.’

‘Personally, I would rather drink the wines from Casablanca and San Antonio, or from Limarí,’ was Tapia’s take. ‘They are fresher, feel tighter, more nervous and there’s more electricity, whereas some from Maipo, Rapel or Maule felt flat. However, with the examples from the coast, you can get funkier smells which could scare people away from these wines.’

‘There were very few duds, but San Antonio was the most interesting,’ said Richards. ‘Elqui and Limarí were also really good; the latter has improved a lot as it’s a region where previously we’ve seen a lot of over-the-top wines. There were also some nice wines from Maule, a region that hasn’t really lit my torch paper in the past. Colchagua and Cachapoal were for me by far the weakest, with Maipo sort

The scores

88 wines tasted

3 Outstanding

10 Highly recommended

53 Recommended

19 Fair

0 Poor

3 Faulty

of in the middle; I don’t think that Syrah is a brilliant grape for Maipo, but it does do well. If I’ve picked up on one general trend, it’s to make more drinkable wines. That may be a reflection of the 2010 and 2011 vintages which are naturally cooler years, but I think the desire is there, which is fantastic to see.’

It was a sentiment shared by Tapia who claimed that ‘the trend in Chile is for fresher fruit and less oak’. Vianna agreed, saying ‘The winemaking was very good. Many of the wines are fresh and vibrant, with excellent drinkability, plus they are picking earlier and the oak is being pulled back,’ adding that he felt ‘some of the quality and value for money is stunning’.

As to the future, Vianna was hoping for more experimentation in the winemaking, such as using amphorae, whole-bunch fermentation and co-fermentation. Richards, meanwhile, felt that key was getting the merchants and importers on board – and staying on board – as the assorted styles of Chilean Syrah began to clarify: ‘The quality is there, but it’s a game of patience and you need to bring people with you. Unfortunately the wine world moves quite slowly, but my call would be for people who sell and love wine to keep the faith with Chilean Syrah because it’s getting better and better. For me, Syrah can and should be the country’s best red grape, but they’re going to need people to support it.’

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release Chilean Shiraz/ Syrah. A maximum of two wines per producer was permitted and wines had to be a minimum of 85% of the variety.

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Casa Marín, Miramar Vineyard, Lo Abarca, San Antonio 2010

Decanter average score: 18.75/20pts (95+/100pts)

Individual judges’ scores: Dirceu Vianna Jr MW 18.5 Peter Richards MW 19 Patricio Tapia 18.5

£35.99 Wimbledon Wine Cellars

This small, family-run winery in the coastal reaches of San Antonio, just 4km from the icy Pacific, pushes boundaries. It’s a contentious wine. Its almost savage ruggedness is allied to a laser-like precision that can polarise tasters. But, with four years’ age, it is beginning to develop a peppery, savoury perfume that sits beautifully with its lifted, almost ethereal finish. A wine that speaks eloquently of its variety, place and makers, Maria Luz and Felipe Marín, who deserve credit for their audacity and ambition.

Dirceu Vianna Jr MW Elegant and enticingly complex with notes of dark fruits, earthy tones, fresh meat and attractive spiciness. Dry, crisp, savoury, complex, this reveals the typicity of a really serious Syrah. Amazing purity, complex and well made with a long savoury finish.

Peter Richards MW Black pepper, meat and leaf notes emerging nicely. Mineral, taut, cogent, fine, firm and beautiful. This style needs to develop in the bottle. Definitely edgy; one for lovers of purity and that herbal side of Syrah, with the patience to give it more bottle age. A unique beauty.

Patricio Tapia Funky, tense and refreshing; raw meat aromas and a mineral character; tight and crunchy. A delicious expression of cool-climate Syrah.

Drink 2014–2023 Alcohol 12%

The tasters’ verdicts

Dirceu Vianna Jr MW



Originally from Brazil, Vianna Jr, or Junior as he is known, joined the wine trade in 1990. Wine director for the Coe Group in the UK, Junior is also a wine educator, technical consultant, writer and speaker, and appears on South American radio and television.

Vianna Jr’s verdict

‘The fact that nearly 90 samples were on show shows that Chile has really embraced the variety. The best wines displayed excellent fruit expression, intelligent use of

oak as well as complexity enhanced by a little bottle age.

‘The past three years have shown a general improvement in how Syrah has performed in Chile, with better definition, balance and consistency. Fruit is ripe and luscious; alcohol levels are relatively high but the wines maintain a sense of harmony due to refreshing acidity. The use of oak is rarely exaggerated, although many wines would benefit from gentler extraction. The best wines came from cooler sites in San Antonio, Casablanca, Limari and Elqui. Cachapoal and Colchagua are yet to prove their Syrah credentials.

‘Looking ahead, I would like the wines to show more concentration of fruit and this will inevitably happen as the vines mature. It is very important that wines show their sense of place with more clarity and precision. There is still little consensus about style. Some producers are experimenting with components other than Syrah. Without doubt, the best examples were the leaner, fresher styles reminiscent of the wines from the northern Rhône, with exuberant fruit, elegant spiciness, lifted floral notes and complex notes derived from time spent in the bottle. As long as prices remain reasonable and the wines offer good value, Chilean Syrahs stand a real chance of success.’

Peter Richards MW



Richards presents on BBC1’s Saturday Kitchen. Other credits include Sky One, ESPN, The Guardian, ITV1, Radio 4, Times Online and BBC2. A regular Decanter contributor and chairman of its Retailer Awards, Richards was recently described as ‘the world’s leading commentator on Chilean wine’. Together with his wife Susie Barrie MW, Richards runs a wine school and is launching Wine Festival Winchester in November 2014.

Richards’ verdict

‘Wine lovers can be a funny bunch: sometimes adventurous, other times cautious and staid. But everyone loves finding something tasty that also offers great value for money. That’s exactly what Chilean Syrah can deliver.

‘While this line-up didn’t provide the kind of consistent excellence we’ve come to expect from this category, the results are still impressive, and the tasting did showcase the clear diversity of styles as well as the quality of the 2010 and 2011 vintages, and the way in which producers are working to deliver drinkability, letting Syrah’s natural perfume and charm shine through.

‘San Antonio was perhaps the most rewarding region to taste, with styles veering into engagingly arresting, challenging territory. Elqui remains familiarly distinctive while Limarí, Aconcagua Costa and Casablanca were perhaps the most improved areas. It was nice to see some sensitive and clever blending, particularly with Viognier, and a commendably restrained and deft use of oak. Regarding the warmer areas like Rapel, it seems that Chile has cracked “Syrah” but not yet “Shiraz”: more work is needed to make the richer styles drinkable and elegant as well as powerful and intense.’

Patricio Tapia



Having graduated with a journalism degree, Tapia attended Bordeaux University where he studied wine tasting and winemaking. Currently critic for the wines of Argentina, Chile and Spain for Wine & Spirits, for the past nine years he has been a host on South America’s El Gourmet channel. Book credits include The Wines of Colchagua Valley and his annual Descorchados, a guide to the wines of Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.

Tapia’s verdict

‘When Chile’s first commercial Syrahs began to appear in the early 1990s, most followed the Australian model, especially the ripe and voluptuous Barossa style, so it was most often planted in the warm zones. However, a new wave of cool-climate Syrah began to emerge in 2000 from San Antonio, Casablanca and, later, Limarí, lending diversity and proving that the variety is adaptable to different soils and climates. That diversity of flavours is the first thing that this tasting teaches us.

‘The second is that these two styles still coexist: the ripeness of the jam-filled bonbon-style Syrahs and the other, tenser, fresher versions. The former may be more appealing to consumers, who find them easier to understand, although perhaps showing less character and variation. And while the cool-climate Syrahs, on the other hand, may be too funky at times or have the odd meaty or earthy notes that does not always win many fans, they are the ones with the most personality.

‘Chilean Syrah, with these contrasts, continues to be a reliable variety, with consistent wines – and a few oddballs worth discovering.’



Casas del Bosque, Gran Reserva, Casablanca 2011

18.5 (95) DVJ 18.5 PR 18.5 PT 18.5

£12.95–£13.14 ABS Wine Agencies, Christopher Piper, Slurp

Energetic Kiwi winemaker Grant Phelps recounts how one of the first things he did on arriving at Casas del Bosque was to buy up all the stocks of the 2007 vintage of this wine, grown on degraded granites in cool westerly Casablanca, such was its value for money. In his expert hands it remains a benchmark cool-climate Chilean Syrah: floral, peppery, juicy – and ageworthy. The 2011 was a close-run thing, according to Phelps, which almost didn’t get ripe but delivered intense results in the end. ‘The soil is what gives that smoky/flinty character,’ he explains.

DVJ Classy and seductive, with generous aromas of blackberries, bacon fat and black olives. Beautifully complex. Ripe, juicy and pure with sophisticated structure and a pleasant, long finish.

PR Floral and peppery with juicy, crisp dark fruit. With good crunchy acidity, this is edgy, engaging and really drinkable. Love it.

PT Ripe and voluptuous, this wine shows hints of sweet exotic spices and a strong body.

Drink 2014–2020 Alc 14% ➤

Outstanding (continued) 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Ventisquero, Kalfu Sumpai, Leyda, San Antonio 2013 18.5 (95) DVJ 18.75 PR 18.5 PR 18.5
N/A UK [www.ventisquero.com](#)
It’s been heartening to see how this Maipo-based producer has started to deliver wines of real personality and elegance lately. From the micro-production Tara wines made in Huasco, north of Elqui, to the elegant Grey Pinot Noir and fine-boned Enclave Cabernet Sauvignon from Maipo, all have impressed in their own way. And now comes this brand new Leyda Syrah, a

complex, floral-scented red with savoury overtones, edgy yet compelling and utterly moreish. From the cool 2013 vintage, it’s still young and would benefit from some months in the bottle – if you have the patience to wait.

DVJ Beautiful cool-climate Syrah; lean and spicy with notes of ripe blackberries, violets, black pepper and sweet spices. Overt, fragrant and hedonistic with sophisticated structure, seamless texture, intense ripe sweet fruit and pure savoury notes. Complex, delicious and persistent.

PR Complex and floral. It’s a bit edgy, with some high tones coming into play. It’s also savoury, juicy and really engaging – a lovely drink. Creamy notes emerge with time when it becomes a bit simpler, but it still retains a good juicy style.

PT Crunchy and light, with refreshing flavours and lively acidity; this is the one to drink by the bottle instead of by the glass.

Drink 2014–2021 **Alcohol** 13.5%

Highly Recommended 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Casas del Bosque, Pequeñas Producciones, Casablanca 2012 17.75 (92) DVJ 17.5 PR 18.5 PT 17.5
£25 **ABS** Wine Agencies
Feral, meaty, dark, brooding and engaging. Great presence of red fruit flavours and soft yet tense texture. So much to love with this wine; a good example of cool-climate Syrah.
Drink 2014–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Errázuriz, Aconcagua Costa 2012 17.75 (92) DVJ 17 PR 18 PR 18
£14.99 **Bacchus** Wine, Oxford Wine Co, Wimbledon Wine Cellars
Pleasant and leafy, with herbal fresh dark fruit aromatics. The palate is tight and refreshing, with a solid grip, an impressive finish and a nice life ahead. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Tamaya, Winemaker’s Gran Reserva, Limarí 2011 17.75 (92) DVJ 17.5 PR 18 PT 18
N/A UK [www.tamayawines.cl](#)
Vibrant notes of currants, red plums and apricots plus a hint of minerality on the nose. Juicy, fine yet firm tannins. A broad heart-warming style that is hard not to love. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Casa Marín, Marks & Spencer, Viñedos Lo Abarca, San Antonio 2013 17.5 (91) DVJ 17.5 PR 18 PT 17
£11.99 **Marks & Spencer**
Crackling with edgy energy, currant notes and candied fruits. Needs time, patience and a certain kind of drinker who likes this kind of biting vigour. Will reward cellaring. **Drink** 2014–2025 **Alc** 12.5%

‘Fruit is ripe and luscious, alcohol is relatively high, but the wines maintain a sense of harmony’
Dirceau Vianna Junior MW



San Pedro, 1865 Limited Edition, Elqui 2010 17.5 (91) DVJ 17.5 PR 17.5 PR 17.5
N/A UK [www.sanpedro.cl](#)
Exuberant in spices, violets and black minerality. A hedonistic style that has juicy acidity and is elegantly bittersweet with some meaty, savoury, herbal notes. This will give pleasure to lots of people! **Drink** 2014–2019 **Alc** 14%



Kingston Family Vineyards, Bayo Oscuro, Casablanca 2012 17.25 (90+) DVJ 17 PR 17.5 PT 17.5
N/A UK [www.kingstonvineyards.com](#)
Classy and subdued, with blackberry and dark cherry notes and a hint of soy. Really nice peppery, savoury style, and a Syrah-ness that really engages. Lovely. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Loma Larga, Casablanca 2008 17.25 (90+) DVJ 17.5 PR 17.5 PT 17
N/A UK [www.lomalarga.com](#)
Engaging. Raw meat! Toasty notes with peppery, spicy, dark berry fruit. Inviting and complex with notes of game, leather, liquorice and sweet spices. Dry, ripe, juicy elegance with a beautiful, creamy texture. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14%



Tamaya, T Limited Release, Limarí 2011 17.25 (90+) DVJ 17 PR 18 PT 16.5
N/A UK [www.tamayawines.cl](#)
Dark, brooding, meaty aromas. Dense, savoury and fine. A decadent style, filled with sweetness and ripe fruit. Quite sleek and self-contained with nice savoury, meaty elements. Impressive; aged nicely too. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14%

Highly Recommended (continued) 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Falernia, Reserva, Elqui 2011 17 (90) DVJ 16.5 PR 18 PT 16.5
£11.99 **Carruthers & Kent, Slurp**
Spicy and vibrant, lots of life and energy here. With lots going on, this wine has plenty to say for itself. A classic, spicy, savoury Elqui Syrah, with hints of ashes, dark chocolate and crisp acidity. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14%



Villard, Expresión Reserve, Casablanca 2012 17 (90) DVJ 17 PR 16.5 PT 17.5
£8.95 **The Wine Society**
Resinous, with dried mint, eucalypt and cassis purée. Old school, lively and refreshing for a warm year like 2012. Packed with ripe, red fruit flavours and meaty character. **Drink** 2014–2020 **Alc** 14%

Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	DVJ	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Maycas del Limarí, Reserva Especial, Limarí 2012	16.75 (89)	17.5	16	17	Buckets of red and dark fruits as well as violets, fruit cake and sweet spices. Beautiful texture, refined structure and a pleasant finish.	14%	2014–2019	£11	Bibendum
Mayu, Reserva, Elqui 2012	16.75 (89)	16.75	17	16.5	Inviting nose of mashed dark fruit with meaty, spicy, olive overtones. Dark chocolate flavours, with mineral tones and black fruit. Sweet, round texture.	14%	2014–2020	£18.99	Guy Anderson Wines
Morandé, Gran Reserva, Maule 2011	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Engaging, high toned blue fruit, very Maule. Filled with bright red fruit, this is warm but also firm and balanced. Plenty of spice and gamey flavours.	14%	2014–2019	£12.49	Coe Vintners, Hercules Wine Merchants, Slurp, Stainton Wines, The Drink Shop
Quintay, Q, Grand Reserve, Casablanca 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	17	16.5	Dark, peppery, bloody. Leafy notes. Juicy, succulent, mid-weight. Needs more complexity and cogency to be very good. Nice and drinkable Syrah.	14%	2014–2018	£12.49	Ocado
Tabalí, Reserva, Limarí 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17.5	A refreshing style. Mineral, tense and crunchy, with lots of red fruit. A nice, fresh palate with grainy tannins showing plenty of red and dark fruits.	14%	2014–2018	£9.95	Momentum Wines, Stone, Vine & Sun, Wines of Interest
Emiliana, Signos de Origen, La Quebrada, Casablanca 2012	16.5 (88)	16	17	16.5	Floral, ripe cassis, creamy aromatics. Robust, opulent, with strong presence of alcohol and tannins. Needs time in the bottle or meat on the table.	14.5%	2014–2019	£14.99	Boutinot
Maycas del Limarí, Sumaq Reserva, Limarí 2012	16.5 (88)	16	17.5	16	Chocolate, dark berry fruit. Juicy, refreshing, nice spice with bittersweet dark fruits. Lovely accent on freshness, with a vibrant Limarí character.	13.5%	2014–2018	£9	Bibendum
Santa Rita, Medalla Real Gran Reserva, Limarí 2011	16.5 (88)	16.25	16.5	17	Seductive notes of blueberries, black cherries and sweet spices. Ripe and voluptuous, extracted and big, but with very good grip and tense acidity.	13.5%	2014–2019	N/A UK	www.santarita.com
Starry Night, Maria Pinto, Maipo 2011	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.5	16.5	Edgy mix of floral, peppery, stewed leaf and dark fruits. Buckets of fruit. Overt, generous ripe fruits. Inviting, approachable and juicy.	14.5%	2014–2020	N/A UK	www.atabaleswines.cl
Alto de Casablanca, Ritual, Casablanca 2013	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	16	Juicy, dark and inky. Fresh, engaging, rounded, upfront. Succulent, mashed red and black fruit. Pleasing and gluggable if a bit warm on the finish.	14%	2014–2018	£12.99	Mike Hothersall
Concha y Toro, Marques de Casa Concha, Buin, Maipo 2011	16.25 (87)	15	17.5	16.5	Smoky, meaty, roasted fruit. Lots of dense, fine-grained tannins. Not too sweet. Very well made, with intense ripe dark fruits and sweet spice hints.	14.5%	2014–2020	£11.99	Tesco, Winedirect
Errázuriz, Max Reserva, Aconcagua 2012	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	Leafy, peppery hints. Ripe dark fruit. Nice focus with a savoury grip. Not over the top, with blackberry fruit, refreshing flavours and a tight structure.	14%	2014–2020	£13.99	Hatch Mansfield
Junta, Reserva Momentos, Curicó 2013	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.5	Youthful, vibrant aromas of blackberries, cassis with a herbaceous hint. Easy to drink, this is easy to understand, with its focus on fruit and acidity.	13%	2014–2017	£9.99	The Real Wine Co.
Luis Felipe Edwards, Marea, Leyda, San Antonio 2012	16.25 (87)	15	17	16.5	Violet, dark berry. Juicy, savoury, dense, spicy. Really nice. Lots going on, even if it could be a bit tauter. A big red for the barbecue.	14.5%	2014–2018	£13.99	McDonald Wine Store
Matetic, EQ, San Antonio 2011	16.25 (87)	15.5	16	17	Roasted herbs, sweet dark fruit. Decent but quite big in style. Voluptuous, round and fat. A fleshy wine, with generous fruit and leather.	14%	2014–2020	£23	Armit
Tabalí, Reserva Especial, Limarí 2011	16.25 (87)	16	16	16.5	Restrained, brooding aromatics. Firm, fine tannins. Self-contained black fruit and sweet, exotic spices. Quite restrained now, will reward patience.	14%	2014–2020	£11.95	Camber Wines, Slurp, St Andrews Wine Co, Taylors of Tickhill
Undurraga, TH, Santa Ana, Maipo 2011	16.25 (87)	17	15.5	16	Classy, displaying notes of dark fruits, liquorice, fruit cake and sweet spices. This is a classic example of New World, warm-climate Syrah.	14%	2014–2018	£11.99–£13.99	Davis Bell McCraith, The Drink Shop
Ventisquero, Grey Single Block, Apalta, Colchagua 2011	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Roasted plum and damson. Creamy, nutty notes. Some dried fruit in there. Good purity of fruit and sturdy structure. Needs patience.	14%	2014–2018	£12.49–£14.50	Bellinis, City Beverage, Davy’s, Exel Wines, Hawkshead Wines, Hop Pocket Wine, Priory Wines, Real Wine Co
Viña Casablanca, Nimbus, Casablanca 2011	16.25 (87)	17.5	15.5	16	Backward, restrained and sophisticated with notes of dark fruits and the medicine cabinet. Beautifully structured, pure with a long finish.	14%	2014–2018	£14.99	Vineyards of Sherborne

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	DVJ	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Viña Garces Silva, Amayna, Leyda, San Antonio 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16.5	16	Peachy, peppery dark fruit. Savoury, juicy, spicy – lovely stuff. Apricot and blackberry with black pepper overtones. Bit hot on the finish.	14.5%	2014-2018	£19.99	The Wine Cellar, The Drink Shop, Old School Wines
Viña Maipo, Alto Tajamar, Buin, Maipo 2010	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16	Expressive with notes of dark fruits, sous-bois and sweet oak spice. Autumnal style. Impressive, well structured, firm but a bit overpowering.	14.5%	2014-2020	N/A UK	www.vinamaipo.com
Viña Maipo, Vitral Reserva, Central Valley 2013	16.25 (87)	15.5	16	17	Intense and crunchy, this is a refreshing style of Syrah, focused on acidity and firm tannins to support any kind of meat, especially from the grill.	13.5%	2014-2020	£8.99	Morrison's
Aresti, Trisquel, Maipo 2012	16 (86)	17	15.5	15.5	A restrained, backwards style with notes of dark fruits, pepper, olive tapenade and violets on the nose. Tight structure and slightly charry.	14%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.arestichile.cl
Cono Sur, 20 Barrels, Limarí 2011	16 (86)	15.25	16.5	16	Dark chocolate with macerated dark fruits. Juicy, a touch of spice, quite full and firm. Ripe, juicy with texture and a hint of bitterness on the finish.	14%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.conosur.com
De Martino, 347 Reserva, Choapa 2012	16 (86)	16	15	17	Dark, brooding and spicy. Dried mint. A fragrant, overt style with notes of red fruits and a herbaceous hint. Dry, crisp, ripe, simple and fruit forward.	13.5%	2014-2018	£9.99	Virgin Wines
Garcia Schwadere, Sofia, Casablanca 2012	16 (86)	15.5	15	17.5	Nice, tense, crunchy example of cool-climate Syrah. It feels fresh and lively, with hints of flowers and meat aromas. Broad, juicy and very commercial.	15%	2014-2019	£19.99	Naked Wines
Viña von Siebenthal, Carabantes, Panquehue, Aconcagua 2011	16 (86)	15	16	17	Filled with dark cherry flavours and sweet spices – cinnamon everywhere. Slightly rustic style, very Aconcagua in its broad rich tones. Juicy, attractive.	14.5%	2014-2020	£20	Butlers Wine Cellar, Carruthers & Kent, Define Food & Wine, Good Wine Online, Highbury Vintners
Aquitania, Reserva, Maipo 2013	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16	Youthful, lifted touches of currant, spice and leafy notes. Blackberry compote. Juicy, quite simple, engaging. Ready to drink, warm and tender.	14.5%	2014-2017	£12.95	Winety
Carmen , Gran Reserva, Apalta, Colchagua 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16.5	15	Loganberry, blueberries and a hint of smoky bacon. Ripe juicy fruit combines with elegant savoury notes. Too hot on the finish but some nice elements.	14.5%	2014-2018	£13.99	Hallgarten Druit
Casas del Toqui, Terroir Selection Gran Reserva, Alto Cachapoal 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	15	16.5	Minty, creamy and leafy, with gingery dark fruit. Slightly medicinal and feral too.	14%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.casasdeltoqui.cl
De Martino, Legado Reserva, Choapa 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	16	Attractive and complex notes of leather, liquorice, violets and bramble. Muscular, forward with lovely juicy fruit. Well made with mineral undertow.	13.5%	2014-2019	£12.99	Les Caves de Pyrène
Falernia, Aymura Reserva, Elqui 2011	15.75 (85+)	16.25	14.5	16.5	Herbal, meaty, balsa notes. Funky. Blackberries, leather, sous-bois on the nose. Dry, fresh acidity, well-structured with a pleasant, savoury finish.	14%	2014-2020	£10.99	Marks & Spencer
Kingston Family Vineyards, Lucero, Casablanca 2012	15.75 (85+)	16	14.5	16.5	Lively, delicate aromas of dark fruits, chocolate and liquorice. Restrained. Ripe, juicy and forward style with pleasant mouthfeel and attractive finish.	14.5%	2014-2019	£15.96	Marks & Spencer
Luis Felipe Edwards, La Poderosa Reserva, Rapel 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	16.5	16	Floral, spiritry, roasted herb aromas. Soft and tender, with easy simple flavours of super-ripe fruit and a spicy finish. Nicely made.	14%	2014-2017	£8.99	Widely available via UK agent Inverarity Morton/Forth Wines
Pérez Cruz, Limited Edition, Maipo 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.50	15.5	16	Malty, clove and dark fruits. Dense, juicy, firm. Not the most complex, but has ripe and juicy fruit, light earthy, minty and leafy notes, and a pleasant finish.	14.5%	2014-2017	£15.49	Hallgarten Druit, Novum Wines
Peumayen, Gran Reserva, Panquehue, Aconcagua 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	Super minty, roasted plum, earthy notes. Fine, firm and gutsy. Sweet spices, a classic example of warm-climate Syrah with ample, ripe texture.	14%	2014-2017	N/A UK	www.peumayen.com
Viña Casablanca, Neblus, Casablanca 2011	15.75 (85+)	14.5	17	16	Restrained dark fruit and pepper. Juicy, succulent, savoury. Touch of spice on the finish. Well put together. Lush, opulent, with meaty flavours. Good.	14.5%	2014-2018	£25	Hayward Brothers
Viu Manent, Single Vineyard El Olivar Alto, Colchagua 2012	15.75 (85+)	15.50	16	16	A restrained, elegant, backwards style. Dark fruits, tar and earthy notes. Warm and mellow, a good example of an everyday red. Pair with stew.	14.5%	2014-2017	£18	Louis Latour Agencies
Caliterra, Tributo, Colchagua 2012	15.5 (85)	14.5	16.5	15.5	Ripe, juicy dark fruits underpinned by a sturdy structure. Good wine for roasted meat with its really ripe fruits. A touch firm so needs time.	14%	2014-2018	£10.99	Hatch Mansfield
Casas del Toqui, Gran Toqui, Cachapoal 2012	15.5 (85)	16.5	14.5	15.5	Resinous, ripe plum and cassis. Seductive and perfumed with notes of raspberries, blackcurrants, candied fruit and sweet spices. Easy going.	14%	2014-2019	N/A UK	www.casasdeltoqui.cl
Matetic, Corralillo, San Antonio 2011	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Dark fruits including cassis and black cherries as well as dark chocolate. A big wine, ripe and sweet, filled with black fruit flavours and exotic spices.	14%	2014-2017	£8	Armit Wines
Montes, Alpha, Apalta, Colchagua 2007	15.5 (85)	17	15.5	14	Lovely, complex nose with dark fruits, cigar box, sous-bois and sweet spices. Nice evolution but also shows the alcohol on the finish. Drink up.	14.5%	2014-2019	£12.99	Liberty Wines, Slurp
Valdivieso, Caballo Loco Grand Cru, Limarí 2012	15.5 (85)	16.5	14	16	Meaty and red fruit character. Rustic tannins, filled with spices and candied fruit. Restrained structure, displaying freshness, finesse and persistence.	14.5%	2014-2017	N/A UK	www.valdiviesovineyard.com
Oveja Negra, Single Vineyard, Maule 2011	15.25 (84)	15	15	16	Macerated cherries. Tangy, juicy and simple, this is an ideal Syrah for pouring by the glass, although does lack some vibrancy and concentration.	13.5%	2014-2016	£12.99	Hallgarten Druitt
Santa Carolina, Reserva de Familia, Maipo 2011	15.25 (84)	15.5	15	15	Creamy, plush dark fruit. Super-ripe flavours, intense and warm with hints of spice. A little sturdy and perhaps the fruit should've been picked earlier.	15%	2014-2017	£15.99	Percy Fox
Santa Rita, Reserva, Maipo 2011	15.25 (84)	15	16	14.5	Quite elegant, showing some age. Dried fruit, tobacco. Well defined notes of dark fruits including blueberries and blackberries. Pure and well structured.	13.5%	2014-2019	£9.99	Wine Rack

Recommended (continued) 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	DVJ	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Valdivieso, Single Vineyard, Aconcagua 2010	15.25 (84)	16	14	16	Super minty and chocolatey. Sleek, modern, flashy style displaying intense red fruits and more lifted minty notes. Opulent, grainy and quite worked.	14%	2014-2017	N/A UK	www.valdiviesovineyard.com
Valle Secreto, First Edition, Cachapoal 2011	15.25 (84)	16	15.5	14	Attractive and youthful with ripe juicy dark fruits including blackberries, dark cherries and a hint of undergrowth. Juicy, decent and solid.	14.5%	2014-2018	N/A UK	www.vallesecreto.cl
Arboleda, Aconcagua 2011	15 (83)	15	14	16	Oak and black fruit, plus mineral tones blended with toasty flavours. Subdued dark fruits, ripe and juicy but a bit one-dimensional.	14%	2014-2017	£14.50	Leamington Wine Co, Raffles Fine Wine
Lapostolle, Cuvée Alexandre, Apalta, Colchagua 2011	15 (83)	15.5	15.5	14	Bold, plush dark fruit and roasted herbs. Big, rich and alcoholic. With its extracted style, it's impressive but hard to drink even if tannins are fine.	15%	2014-2018	£17-£20	All About Wine, D Bryne & Co, Fareham Wine Cellars, Oakham Wines Online
Luis Felipe Edwards, Puertas Antiguas, Central Valley 2013	15 (83)	16	15	14	Vivacious and overt notes of blackberries, plums, liquorice and spices. Hints of smoke, plum and cassis. Soft, easy going and very easy drinking.	13%	2014-2017	£7.50	Corney & Barrow
Undurraga, TH, Leyda, San Antonio 2011	15 (83)	14.5	14.5	16	Peppery, meaty, bloody. Super-ripe black fruits that are quite extracted. Tarry, earthy, traditional, international style that lacks some purity.	13.5%	2014-2016	£12.49	Hangingditch, The Drink Shop
Viu Manent, Secret de Viu Manent, Colchagua 2012	15 (83)	15	14.5	15.5	High-toned with notes of roasted herbs. A straightforward, commercial style that's a touch hard, grainy and ready for some steak.	14%	2014-2017	£10.99	Bon Coeur, Peckhams, Whole Foods Market

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)
■ Casa Verdi, 1918, Curicó 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Chateau Los Boldos, Amalia, Cachapoal 2012 14.75 (82)
■ Cousiño-Macul, Antiguas Reservas, Maipo 2010 14.75 (82) ■ Cousiño-Macul, Central Valley 2011 14.75 (82) ■ François Lurton, Hacienda Araucano Reserva, Lolol, Colchagua 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Lagar de Bezana, Edición Limitada, Alto Cachapoal 2012 14.75 (82)
■ Montes, Folly, Apalta, Colchagua 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Siegel, Special Reserve, Colchagua 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Trabun, Requinoa, Cachapoal 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Arestí, Family Collection, Rapel 2012 14.5 (81) ■ Miguel Torres, Cordillera, Maule 2010 14.5 (81) ■ Polkura, Marchigüe,

Colchagua 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Chateau Los Boldos, Vieilles Vignes, Cachapoal 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Polkura, Block g+i, Marchigüe, Colchagua 2011 14.25 (80+) ■ Torreón de Paredes, Reserva Privada, Rengo, Cachapoal 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Viña Santa Cruz, Chamán Gran Reserva, Colchagua 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Estampa, Assemblage Reserve, Colchagua 2009 14 (80) ■ Loma Larga, Unfiltered, Casablanca 2010 13.75 (79) ■ Anakena, Tama Vineyard Selection, Colchagua 2012 13.25 (78)

Faulty
■ Casa Silva, Cool Coast, Paradoses, Colchagua 2012 (reduced) ■ Casa Silva, Gran Terroir de la Costa, Lolol,

Colchagua 2012 (out of condition) ■ Villard, Tanagra, Casablanca 2010 (corked)

For full details of UK stockists, see p90

Next month's panel tastings
Médoc crus classés 2004
& Ribera del Duero

Expert summary: Peter Richards MW

With a good hit rate overall, it was the cooler regions that excelled, with San Antonio, Casablanca and Limarí joining Elqui at the top table



Peter Richards MW is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile, and recently published his *Chile Wine Brief 2013*

PERHAPS WE EXPECT a bit much of Chilean Syrah. It's been such an exciting category of late that fireworks are expected from a line-up like this. This tasting did feature some exceptional wines, healthy diversity and a commendable level of consistency. And yet we came away wanting more. Such is the burden of high expectations. Taking a more analytical view of the results, this was a very decent showing. Three Outstanding wines, in a range of styles, with 10 Highly Recommended and 53 Recommended. That's a strike rate of 75%. Getting into the specifics, it's interesting to note that all of the top 13 wines were from cooler-climate areas, including San Antonio, Casablanca, coastal Limarí, Elqui or Aconcagua Costa. By contrast, 14 of the 19 wines rated Fair were from the warmer Central Valley regions. Clearly, we tasters favoured the fresher, more peppery style of Syrah, and this might be an area for Chilean producers to focus their efforts upon. That said, there clearly is a place for richer styles in the market, more akin to classic Australian Shiraz, but Chilean producers need to improve their work in this regard. Too many of the richer styles were unbalanced – either by alcohol or extraction – when actually a successful warm-climate Shiraz is all about voluptuous charm rather than aggressive astringency or bitterness.

Last time we reviewed Chilean Syrah in 2011, the success rate for wines rated Recommended or above was almost identical. Then, there were no outstanding wines but Elqui accounted for many of the top awards. Has it been usurped? I don't think so – only four Elqui wines were submitted and they performed solidly. What we're seeing is other Chilean regions upping their game – like Casablanca, Limarí, San Antonio – bolstering diversity and quality at the top end. Successful producers including Casa Marín, Ventisquero, Casas del Bosque, Tamaya, Errázuriz, Tabalí, Maycas del Limarí, Falernia (including Mayu) and Viña Maipo all had two wines rated above 16 points. Again, this indicates a broadening of a producer base excelling in Syrah, rather than a predominance of just a few specialists. No one vintage stood out – it's best to lay more weight on producer and region than individual vintages. That said, the cool, dry 2010 and 2011 vintages have made some very fine wines, many of which will benefit from further age. **D**

‘There’s a broadening of those excelling in Syrah, rather than a predominance of just a few’

My top three
Dirceu Vianna Jr MW

■ **Ventisquero, Kalfu Sumpai, San Antonio 2013** ‘Kalfu’ means blue in the language of indigenous inhabitants of Chile and refers to the colour of the Pacific Ocean. Alejandro Galaz claims to be a specialist in cool-climate wines in Chile and has crafted this beautifully lean, spicy and complex wine. **18.75/20pts (95+/100pts) Drink** 2014-2021

■ **Casa del Bosque, Gran Reserva, Casablanca 2011** Vineyards were originally planted in 1998 on hillside blocks in some of the coolest parts of Casablanca. This is a classy and seductive wine with intense aromas of blackberries and blueberries combined with elegant notes of violets, black olives and sweet spices. **18.5 (95) Drink** 2014-2020

■ **Casa Marín, Miramar Vineyard, Lo Abarca, San Antonio 2010** This is a superb expression of the terroir of Lo Abarca only 4km from the ocean at 200m altitude planted on volcanic and granitic soils. Painfully low yields deliver exceptional concentration of fruit and enticingly complex floral and spicy notes that would make most people think they are drinking a northern Rhône. **18.5 (95) Drink** 2014-2023

My top three
Peter Richards MW

■ **Tamaya, Winemaker’s Gran Reserva, Limarí 2011** This northerly winery has been doing promising things with Carmenere, Chardonnay and Syrah for a while, so it's great to see it delivering excellent results with two Highly Recommended wines, including this exuberant, floral blend with Viognier. **18/20pts (93/100pts) Drink** 2014-2020

■ **Errázuriz, Aconcagua Costa 2012** There's a notable accent on freshness and lift here, which makes this wine wonderfully drinkable and moreish, but still with Syrah's hallmark spice and perfume. Less is more. **18 (93) Drink** 2014-2020

■ **Morandé, Gran Reserva, Maule 2011** Chile's south has bags of potential for Syrah so it was good to see this wine, which expresses both the beauty of the variety and its place: wild, tangy, spicy and invigorating. **17 (90) Drink** 2014-2019

NB: the tasters’ top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those which, on learning the wines’ identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

My top three
Patricio Tapia

■ **Casa Marín, Miramar Vineyard, Lo Abarca, San Antonio 2010** One of the most radical examples of the variety in Chile, this coastal wine is funky in aromas and rich in red fruits and meaty notes with a mineral character. The palate is pure acidic tension. **18.5/20pts (95/100pts) Drink** 2014-2023

■ **Tamaya, Winemaker’s Gran Reserva, Limarí 2011** Made in an opulent style but marked by intense acidity and mineral notes such as coal. The tannic structure easily stands up to all the fruity weight in this Syrah from one of Limarí's most important wineries. **18 (93) Drink** 2014-2020

■ **Errázuriz, Aconcagua Costa 2012** A crystalline expression of a cool-climate wine, the meaty aromas intermingle with flavours of black fruits and mineral notes. The texture is voluptuous but marked by sharp acidity and non-stop freshness. **18 (93) Drink** 2014-2020

DECANTER PROMOTION

CARMEN

Santa Rita Estates Europe
(Carmen and Santa Rita)
www.santaritaestateseurope.com
E: info@santaritaestateseurope.com
Santa Rita UK office Tel: 01865 404700

CARMEN
GRAN RESERVA
SYRAH
APALTA
CHILE 2011

USA distribution for Carmen
Trinchero Family Estates
100 St. Helena Hwy (Hwy. 29) South
St. Helena, CA 94574
www.tfe.com

Santa Rita

MEDALLA REAL
GRAN RESERVA
SYRAH 2011
LIMARÍ VALLEY - CHILE

USA distribution for Santa Rita
Palm Bay International
48 Harbor Park Drive
Port Washington, NY 11050-4653
Tel. (800) 872-5622 or 516-802-4700
www.palmbay.com