

# Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon

This noble Bordeaux grape has been a key player in Chile for 150 years. Peter Richards MW looks at the ups and downs in its success and what the future holds

JUST AS CABERNET Sauvignon is the aristocrat of grapes, so it was Chilean aristocrats who first introduced it to a country where it has since thrived with profligate abandon.

Chile's wine story began in the mid-16th century. European colonists and Catholic missionaries established vineyards for religious and proprietorial purposes. But back then the accent was not so much on quality as functionality. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that Cabernet Sauvignon arrived in Chile, along with a host of other so-called 'noble' varieties including Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Merlot and Carmenere. They were brought by Chile's wealthy elite, enriched by the booming mining business in the north, who had travelled around the fashionable centres of Europe and returned with the must-have items of their day.

This, then, was the start of a story that has since seen many ups and downs. Nevertheless, it is fair to say that Cabernet has remained a key player on the Chilean wine scene for the last 150 years. I've recently tasted Chilean Cabernets from the 1950s and 1960s that are outstanding.

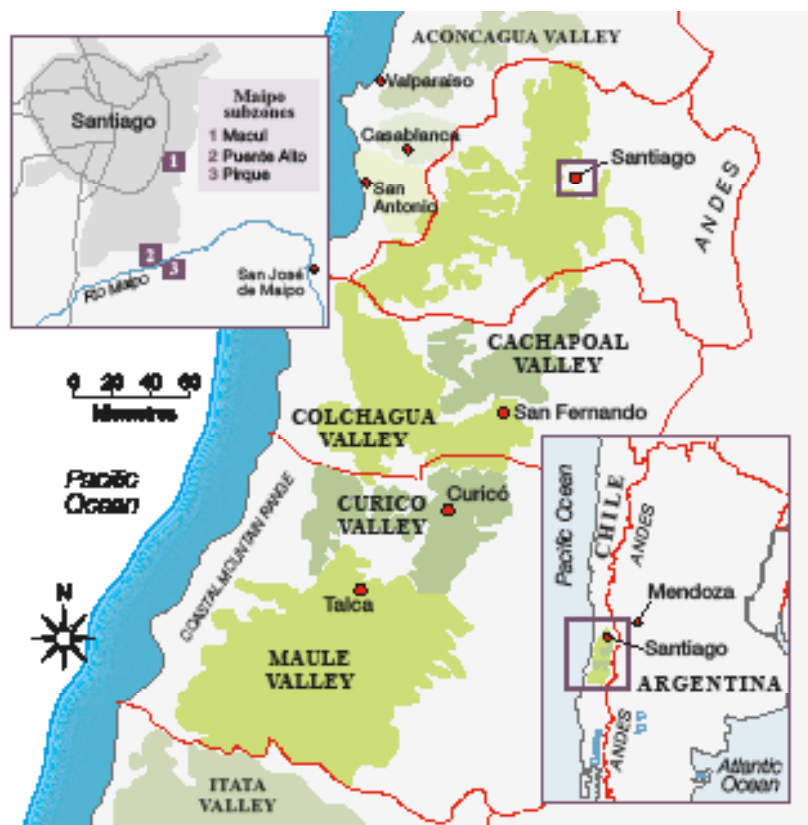
Fast-forward to 1994 and, at the start of Chile's modern wine boom, Cabernet was by far the dominant grape variety along with País (the missionaries' vine) when together they accounted for over half of the national vineyard. Cabernet has since eclipsed all other rivals, its rise vertiginous (albeit plateauing now), accounting for 32% of Chile's vineyard land today. Its plantings are more than its three nearest rivals combined: Sauvignon Blanc, Merlot and Carmenere.

## A global staple

There are many reasons behind Cabernet's ascendancy in Chile. The hardy, productive plant adapted well to sites all over the country. It thrived in the reliably warm climate and alluvial/colluvial soils. It fared well on its own roots (Chile remains phylloxera-free so traditionally most vines were planted without rootstock). While phylloxera ravaged European vineyards, there was plenty of Bordelais expertise willing to emigrate to help establish the early vineyards. Land-owners loved the notion that they were excelling in the same variety as the aristocrats of the Médoc. Most importantly, consumers adored it and soon Chilean Cabernet had become a staple in the canon of world wine.

These days, Cabernet Sauvignon still thrives all across Chile, even if plantings are notably sparse in the cooler coastal and southerly areas. Key quality hotspots have proven to be the Andean foothills in the east, where altitude moderates warm summer temperatures and gravelly subsoils remind the vines of their spiritual home atop the Médoc gravel beds. Maipo, the region around Chile's capital Santiago, is the area most associated with Cabernet, particularly the renowned sub-zones of Puente Alto, Macul and Pirque. Nowadays, however, it is Colchagua and Maule that have the largest Cabernet vineyards.

It's true to say that other grape varieties have lately stolen centre stage in Chilean wine from Cabernet, at least among the chattering classes (in which grouping I include myself). Pinot Noir, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, even the likes of Carignan, Cinsault and Cabernet's old rival País have chimed with the zeitgeist. Many of these have seen their plantings increase while Cabernet's have remained largely static over the last decade. Nonetheless, Cabernet has



## Chilean Cabernet: know your vintages

**2014** Low yields (frost, drought) and cool temperatures gave fresh, intense wines.

**2013** Mixed bag after December rains. Most are fresh, bright wines.

**2012** Very hot year, some wines overblown.

**2011** Many elegantly defined wines that are maturing well.

**2010** Cool year, giving some excellent Cabernets.

**2009** Warm vintage led to generous wines, some ageing fast.

## Chilean Cabernet: the facts

**Total vine plantings** 130,362ha

**Cabernet Sauvignon plantings** 42,195ha

**Cabernet plantings since 2003** 6% increase

### Key regions

Colchagua (12,445ha),  
Maule (10,802ha),  
Maipo (6,669ha),  
Curicó (5,404ha),  
Cachapoal (4,918 ha)

Sources: SAG Catastro 2013, Origo Chilean Wine Regions Map

remained stubbornly popular among Chilean wine producers in this time.

Popularity doesn't always equate to success, however. While most of Chile's most expensive and ambitious bottles tend to be based on Cabernet, there can be great variability in quality throughout the price spectrum. Such, perhaps, is the price of Cabernet's dominance of Chile's vineyard.

It's also worth remembering that about 75% of Chile's Cabernet vines are less than 20 years old. In this context, the maxim that was often quoted by Mouton-Rothschild's Baroness Philippine de Rothschild is applicable: 'Making wine is easy; it's just the first 200 years that are hard.'

*Peter Richards MW is DWWA Regional Chair for Chile and the author of The Wines of Chile and Chile Wine Brief ➤*

The results

With just 65% of wines recommended, this was a disappointing tasting, our experts criticising the lack of risk-taking and poor winemaking by producers and the homogeneity of wines. John Stimpfig reports

UNFORTUNATELY, THIS TASTING of Chilean Cabernet Sauvignon did not set our tasters' pulses racing.

'I'm afraid it was quite hard going a lot of the time,' said Peter Richards MW, Regional Chair for Chile at the Decanter World Wine Awards. Dirceu Vianna Jr MW was even more critical. 'Chile should be all about vibrancy and purity of fruit, and I just didn't find that,' he said. 'Overall, it was a very disappointing tasting. Quite a few of the wines were faulty with oxidation, Brettanomyces and high volatile acidity. The winemaking sometimes left a lot to be desired.'

Likewise, Jo Ahearne MW was far from enamoured with the line-up. 'I love Chilean wines and was really looking forward to this tasting,' she said. 'But there weren't enough good wines, and the "one size fits all" homogeneity was verging on the boring. I also found some of the wines were raisined and green at the same time. On the strength of this tasting, Cabernet is not doing its job properly in Chile.'

According to Richards, Cabernet is still regarded as a workhorse grape in Chile. 'So it fulfils a role, but doesn't yet enflame the passions or stir you emotionally as it could and should. Part of the problem is that needs as much effort and skill as Pinot Noir to really sing.' He said that it didn't help that many of the wines submitted were from 2012, which

*'Chile should be all about vibrancy and purity of fruit, and I just didn't find that'* Dirceu Vianna Jr MW

was a warm, torrid vintage. 'Even so, it's reprehensible that Chile doesn't do better with Cabernet,' he said.

It wasn't unremittingly bad, said Vianna Jr. 'Curico had three or four wines I was pleasantly surprised by.' He also noted a couple from Maule that were better than the average, 'but that's not a good enough strike rate'. Ahearne agreed: 'We had a number of wines with balance and nice tannins that weren't over-oaked or over-extracted. Just not enough of them.' Richards pointed out some highlights from Alto Maipo which did well – 'and there were some Alto Cachapoal Cabernets that were also good'.

Trying to keep to a positive note, Richards felt that there was a welcome stylistic shift by producers to more focused acidity, lift and structure, and a 'general dimension' in the wines that went beyond ripe fruit and high alcohols. He was also heartened by the decline in minty eucalyptus aromas.

Even so, that still left a lot to be desired. So what can be

The scores



The tasters' verdicts

Jo Ahearne MW



*Ahearne is a winemaking consultant in France, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Macedonia. After working for Oddbins in the UK, she moved to Australia to work at a number of wineries as well as doing a winemaking degree. She then worked as a winemaker in Spain, France, Australia and the Languedoc. In 2004, Ahearne moved back to the UK to blend wines for Marks & Spencer, before a stint as wine and spirits buyer for Harrods.*

Ahearne's verdict

'It was quite a disappointing and challenging tasting with too many wines showing overt vegetal characters and green, unripe, extracted tannins. While there were many wines from the cooler 2012 vintage which could explain the green characters, there were enough from other vintages to show that this lack of physiological ripeness is more of a vineyard issue.

'Since there are a lot of Cabernet plantings in warmer regions, there needs to be some work done to get the best from these vineyards and temper the winemaking to the grapes being produced. Wines with vegetal characters which had not been over-extracted were much more successful.

'The really depressing element was the lack of any Outstanding wines. But those that were successful came in many forms. Juicy, fresh, vibrant and textural, as well as those with more Old World savoury characters and finely judged tannins. Curico, perhaps, performed better than expected but there wasn't a defined regional personality that you get with Pinot Noir, for instance.

'On the plus side, the oak was better judged than in the past. Even very oaky wines had used good oak and had enough richness and concentration to be able to balance the oak-dominated style.'

Peter Richards MW



*Richards is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile. He is a guest presenter on BBC1's Saturday Kitchen as well as other broadcasting appearances. After publishing Wines of Chile and his Chile Wine Brief, Richards was described as 'the world's leading commentator on Chilean wine'. Together with his wife Susie Barrie MW, Richards runs a wine school and wine festival in Winchester.*

Richards' verdict

'It's hardly news that Cabernet Sauvignon isn't the sexiest or most exciting category in Chilean wine. There's so much of it planted that variability is to be expected. But this tasting confirmed just how samey and uninspiring the wines can be when tasted as a set. Chilean Cab simply struggles to excite, with its stereotype of blandly ripe, slightly syrupy tones and inscrutable countenance. Real quality, diversity and thrill were sorely lacking here.

'Chile needs to go back to the drawing board with Cabernet. It needs to be grubbed up from sites that are too hot or ill-conceived and planted in cooler areas that can make more perfumed, edgy styles. Viticulture needs more precision to enable harvest times to be brought forward. Winemakers need to be braver in fashioning not just what is perceived to be a market-friendly style but instead make wines that genuinely express terroir, vintage and ageability. Good winemakers are starting to do this.

'There were some encouraging signs here – the quality of Alto Maipo in general, the reduction in exaggerated eucalypt character and the more sensitive use of oak and extraction. But more needs to be done – always bearing in mind that, as far as Chilean Cabernet is concerned, less is more.'

done? 'Chile needs to take more risks,' asserted Vianna Jr. 'The producers needs to focus more on sites where the growing cycle is longer so the grapes can achieve more tannin ripeness and better balance.'

Richards argued that Cabernet should be pushed more to the extremes and planted at high altitudes. 'And where the hell are all the coastal Cabernets in Chile?' he asked. 'We want to see some! Coastal Cabs seem to work for Bordeaux, so why don't people try that in Chile? The bottom line is that consumers need much more diversity and excitement in Chilean Cabernet, so let's see producers try some other places.'

To conclude, the panel felt that Chile clearly had a lot of work to do with Cabernet Sauvignon. 'In fact, growers and winemakers need to go back to the drawing board, especially at the top end. Not least because Chilean Cabernet has been underperforming for quite a while now,' commented Richards. 'I know there is work going on which is hopefully starting to move it in the right direction, but we didn't see it today.'

This tasting was not the best report card for Chilean Cabernet. 'That's a shame because when I did the *Decanter* Chilean Pinot Noir tasting (October 2013 issue), I was really excited and urged people to make an effort to seek out the best wines,' said Richards. 'After this tasting, I couldn't say the same for Chilean Cabernet.'

**Entry criteria:**  
**producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release Chilean Cabernets (minimum 85%) with a minimum UK retail price of £7.50. One wine per producer was permitted.**

Highly Recommended

17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



**Casas del Bosque, Gran Bosque, Reserva Privada, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2012**  
*Decanter* average score: 17.75/20pts (92/100pts) **Individual judges' scores:**  
**Jo Ahearne MW** 17.5 **Peter Richards MW** 18.5 **Dirceu Vianna Jr MW** 17.5

£35 **ABS Wine Agencies, Christopher Piper**  
Pure cassis sings through both the bouquet and the palate. Attention-grabbing grip and structure with very nice texture. Displaying ripe, juicy fruit, delicate leafy notes, dark chocolate, and sweet spices on the finish. **Drink** 2015 2022 **Alcohol** 14.5%



**Ventisquero, Enclave, Pirque, Maipo Valley 2011** 17.5 (91) **JA** 17 **PR** 19 **DV** 16.5  
£45 **Amathus, Buy Great Wine, Davy's, The Wine Centre, The Wine Chambers, The Wine Show**  
Wood smoke, tobacco leaf and roasted dark fruit: intriguing, mysterious, brooding and complex. Well-made with sturdy tannins, leather flavours and a refined finish. A more elegant, restrained style of Chilean Cabernet. **Drink** 2015–2022 **Alc** 14%



**San Pedro, 1865 Single Vineyard, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2013**  
17.25 (90+) **JA** 17 **PR** 17.5 **DV** 17.5  
£13.99 **Bibendum**  
Seductive and inviting notes of blackberries, mocha and thyme. Flavour profile is focused and juicy, with lovely fresh acidity and a real sense of purpose. Has the concentration to support and a savoury finish. **Drink** 2015–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



**Anakena, Alwa Limited Edition, Cachapoal Valley 2010** 17 (90) **JA** 17 **PR** 17 **DV** 17  
£19 **Bottle Green**  
Modern and alight with dark fruits, chocolate and sweet spices. Nicely grounded with a serious structure but a bit inscrutable in its polished density. An ambitious and impressive wine with good concentration. **Drink** 2015–2022 **Alc** 14% ➤



Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	JA	PR	DV	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Arboleda, Aconcagua Valley 2012	16.75 (89)	17	17	16	Ripe and juicy fruit with notes of cassis and a hint of leather. Quite polished tannic structure overlaying generous red fruit characters.	14%	2015-2018	£15.99	Eagle Wines, Flourish & Prosper, Harvey Nichols, North & South Wines, Selfridges, The Cheddar Vine, Vineyard Wines
Kenos, Reserva, Curicó Valley 2013	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17	Attractive notes of cassis and appealing spicy notes. Velvety texture and a hint of fine tannins and tangy acidity. Youthful and vibrant.	14%	2015-2017	N/A UK	www.villasenorwines.com
Tres Palacios, Cholqui, Maipo Valley 2012	16.75 (89)	16.5	16.5	17	Complex aromas of dried herbs, undergrowth and cigar box. An Old World style with refined tannins and good length.	14.5%	2015-2018	POA	Ellis of Richmond
William Fèvre Chile, Gran Cuvée, Pirque, Maipo Valley 2011	16.75 (89)	16.75	16.5	17	Roasted herbs and dark fruit. A beautiful, more savoury style of Cabernet with fresh acidity, refined tannins and attractive savoury notes.	13.6%	2015-2017	£14.95	Berry Bros & Rudd
Santa Carolina, Reserva de Familia, Maipo Valley 2012	16.5 (88)	16	17.5	16	Roasted dark fruit and creamy oak with hints of rusty iron. Dry, crisp and savoury – almost Old World in style. Very impressive.	13.8%	2015-2020	£13-£17	Amazon, Ehrmanns
Undurraga, Founder's Collection, Maipo Valley 2012	16.5 (88)	16.5	16.5	16.5	Graceful and restrained with notes of blackberries, blueberries and cassis. Solid Maipo Cabernet with an accent on freshness.	13.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.undurraga.cl
Vistamar, Sepia Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013	16.5 (88)	16.5	16	17	Seductive and inviting bouquet of ripe dark fruits, chocolate and sweet spices. Palate is harmonious with lovely texture and complex savoury notes.	13.5%	2015-2018	£8.99	Bottle Green
Caliterra, Tributo, Colchagua Valley 2012	16.25 (87)	15.5	16.5	16.5	Uplifting and inviting aromas of crème de cassis, chocolate and violets. Rounded and fairly plush, with a nice grounding acidity.	14%	2018-2022	£12.70	Ann et Vin, D Byrne & Co, Hoult's Wine Merchants, Partridges
Cono Sur, 20 Barrels, Maipo Valley 2013	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	Lively and youthful aromas of blackberries, cassis and evident leafy notes. Dense, savoury core with fine tannins – really harmonious.	13.5%	2015-2020	£14.95 (2011)	The Wine Society
Torreón de Paredes, Reserva Privada, Rengo, Cachapoal Valley 2010	16.25 (87)	15.5	16	17	Gingery, resinous dark fruit with cigar box notes. Quite warming and comforting with a complex finish yet lacks some vibrancy.	14%	2015-2019	£13.95	Forth Wines, Inverarity Morton
Viña Mar, Reserva Especial, Maipo Valley 2012	16.25 (87)	16	16	16.5	Forward and expressive with notes of cassis, blackberries and green peppercorn, as well as leafy aromas. Well defined and focused.	14%	2016-2020	£9.95	Corney & Barrow
Santa Ema, Amplus, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2012	16 (86)	15.5	17.5	15	Enticing floral, minty aromatics lead to a juicy redcurrant palate. Typical of Alto Maipo: it's fresh, lively, crunchy and upbeat.	14%	2015-2021	£18	Forth Wines, Inverarity Morton
Terramater, Altum, Los Niches, Curicó Valley 2012	16 (86)	16.5	16.5	15	Seductive and inviting notes of blackberries and cassis with a spicy twist. Punchy, good Curicó Cabernet with fine tannins to round it all off.	14.5%	2015-2024	£15.45	Cockburn & Campbell
Tierra Alta, Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2010	16 (86)	16	16	16	Toasty, charred oak aromas and a juicy bittersweet berry flavour profile. Sophisticated savoury notes with a smattering of minty freshness.	13.5%	2015-2019	£14	Peter Watts
Clos des Fous, Grillos Cantores, Alto Cachapoal, Cachapoal Valley 2012	15.75 (85+)	14	16.5	16.5	A youthful wine displaying good purity of fruit, dark chocolate, tar and fruit cake. Fine, firm tannins, juicy acidity and savoury undercurrents.	14%	2015-2020	£10.84-£12.99	Amazon, Champion Wines, Hawkhead, The Fine Wine Co, Theatre of Wine, Slurp, Vagabond Wines, Liberty Wines
Corney & Barrow, Rosario, Central Valley 2014	15.75 (85+)	16.5	16	15	The bright, juicy, leafy red fruit seems quite primary but it is nice and friendly. On the palate it is vibrant, fresh and youthful. Easy drinking.	13.5%	2015-2015	£7.75	Corney & Barrow
Dom Barons de Rothschild (Lafite), Le Dix de Los Vascos, Colchagua 2012	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15	15.5	Gently perfumed with aromas of cassis, blackberries and sweet spices. Spicy, hot, bittersweet fruit with balanced acidity. An easy-drinking wine.	14.5%	2015-2020	£30-£35	Avery's, Bon Coeur, Bucktrout's, Chiselhurst Wines, Laithwaites
Luis Felipe Edwards, Family Selection Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2013	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15	Some velvety texture alongside the green spice characters. Fairly fine and elegantly conceived. The balanced, mid-weight palate is deftly done.	14%	2015-2017	£8.50	North South Wines
MontGras, Antu, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2013	15.75 (85+)	16.5	14.5	16.5	Generous and forward aromas of cassis, mint and dark chocolate. An enticing velvety texture with vibrant eucalyptus aromatics and savoury notes.	14.5%	2015-2016	£12.99-£13.65	Carruthers & Kent, Enotria, Hawkhead, Slurp
Odffjell, Armador Estate Selection, Maipo Valley 2013	15.75 (85+)	16.75	15	15.5	Bright blue and black fruit with some herbal notes. The slightly green tannins are very polished and refined, making for velvety texture.	13%	2015-2018	£9.90	Aged in Oak, Alliance, Carruthers & Kent
Santa Rita, Casa Real, Maipo Valley 2011	15.75 (85+)	14.25	16.5	16.5	Overt, ripe and juicy, with intense notes of cassis, fruit cake, brambles and sweet spices from the oak. A plush, creamy, heart-warming style.	14%	2015-2020	£35	Amazon, Berkmann, Hedonism
Tutunjian, Single Vineyard, Curicó Valley 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16.5	Minty, ripe plum and hints of cassis with some green pepper. The acidity is very pronounced but the tannins are in balance.	14%	2015-2020	£10.50	Barton Brownsdon & Sadler
Viña Casablanca, Nimbus, Maipo Valley 2012	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16	Delicately fragrant combining aromas of dark fruits with leather, undergrowth and cedar. This is very creditable stuff; fine and juicy.	14.5%	2015-2018	£14.99	Vineyards of Sherborne
Viña Maipo, Protegido, Maipo Valley 2011	15.75 (85+)	15.5	15.5	16	Creamy, ripe, juicy and spicy. Quite powerful, showing complexity on the finish with lingering savouriness and firm tannins.	14.5%	2015-2017	£35	Concha y Toro UK
Bodega Volcanes de Chile, Tectonia, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Aromas are restrained with faint notes of dark fruits. Finely textured with touches of graphite and herbs coming through. A solid Alto Maipo.	14%	2015-2018	£12.95	Stone Vine & Sun
Calcu, Futa, Colchagua Valley 2009	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Graceful and elegant aromas of blackberries and cassis. Pretty powerful tannic kick-though is harmonious, with the acidity leaving a clean finish.	13.5%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.calcu.cl
Casas Patronales, Reserva Privada, Maule Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	15	14.5	17	Seductive aromas of ripe blackberries, cassis, dark chocolate and dried herbs. Juicy fruit up front combined with a green tobacco leaf lift on the mid-palate.	14.5%	2015-2016	N/A UK	www.casaspatronales.com
Errazuriz, Max Reserva, Aconcagua Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	16.75	15.5	14.5	Dense, brambly fruit with a good length. Quite a muscular structure with oodles of flavour, if a tad extracted.	14%	2015-2016	£12.99-£14.34	Amazon, Dike & Sons, Dunedin Wines, Hailsham Cellars, Partridges of Sloane Street, Waitrose
François Lurton, Gran Araucano, Colchagua Valley 2011	15.5 (85)	15.5	15	16	Sweet strawberries and violets with a juicy cassis undertone. Ripe and juicy with velvety tannins, pleasant prune fruit and a spicy note on the finish.	14.5%	2015-2018	£30	Wineraks

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

Wine	Score	JA	PR	DV	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Hacienda el Condor, Paya de Millaman, Curicó Valley 2011	15.5 (85)	15	17	14.5	Savoury, intriguing dark fruit character. Juicy, brisk acidity with notes of tar and graphite. Some intensity but the finish is a bit short.	14%	2015-2021	£31.25	Lanchester Wines
Matetic, Corralillo, Maipo Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	16	15.5	15	Decent juicy dark fruit with a touch of spice. Very taut but fine tannin structure with lovely, pure cassis fruit and leaf flavour combination.	14%	2015-2020	£16	Amazon, Armit Wines
Montes, Alpha, Colchagua Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	16.5	15	15	Green peppercorn, graphite and plum fruit with velvety concentration and a spicy, herbal twist. A solid wine in context.	14%	2015-2018	£12.43-£12.99	Amazon, The Fine Wine Co, Slurp, Liberty Wines
Quebrada de Macul, Domus Aurea, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2010	15.5 (85)	15.5	17	14	Lovely sense of maturity, with dried fruit, tobacco and roasted herbs. Some interesting aged characters you do not normally see in Chilean Cabernet.	14.5%	2015-2017	£39.99	Naked Wines
Terranoble, Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	15	16	15.5	Floral notes and raspberry plum flavours provide a fruity punch. A certain lift and complexity to the dark fruit – people will like this style.	13.5%	2015-2018	£12	Amazon, Pimlico Cellars
Viña La Rosa, La Capitana, Cachapoal Valley 2012	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Seductive and inviting notes of black berries, mocha and sweet spices. Crunchy dark fruit flavours that are nice and firm, with good concentration.	14.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.larosa.cl
Apaltagua, Signature, Maipo Valley 2012	15.25 (84)	14.5	15.5	16	Restrained with sophisticated notes of dark fruits, black olives and undergrowth. Firm and slightly chewy palate but ripe with fresh acidity.	%	2015-2020	£19.15	Anthony Byrne
Casas del Toqui, Gran Toqui, Cachapoal Valley 2011	15.25 (84)	16	15	14.5	Floral notes, milk chocolate, redcurrant fruit and a satin texture makes this quite seductive. A bit one-dimensional but has some good elements.	14%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.casasdeltoqui.cl
Chateau Los Boldos, Vieilles Vignes, Alto Cachapoal, Cachapoal Valley 2013	15.25 (84)	16.5	14.5	14.5	Youthful, intense notes of blackberries and a hint of herbaceousness. Lots going on with creamy cassis and a hint of dusty tobacco on the finish.	14.5%	2015-2020	£15	Stevens Garnier
Junta, Grand Reserve, Curicó Valley 2010	15.25 (84)	15.5	14.5	16	Buckets of cassis, blueberries and mint chocolate on the palate intermingled with aromas of dried herbs and tar.	14%	2015-2018 (2009)	£16.99	The Real Wine Co
Koyle, Royale, Los Lingues, Colchagua Valley 2011	15.25 (84)	16.5	15	14.5	Elements of mint and earth aromas give this a little more of an Old World personality. Fresh acidity, though the tannins are a bit dried out.	14.5%	2015-2020	£19	Carruthers & Kent, Fields Morris & Verdin
Pérez Cruz, Pircas de Liguai Single Collection, Maipo Andes, Maipo 2012	15.25 (84)	15.5	14.5	15.5	Vibrant eucalypt and mint characters jostle alongside pure redcurrant fruit with a hint of florality. Lacks some focus and is fairly simple.	14.5%	2015-2017	£30	Hallgarten Druitt, Novum
San Vicente, Chungará Gran Reserva, Maule Valley 2013	15.25 (84)	14.5	15	16.5	Some nice tobacco leaf and blackberry fruit with firm tannins and excellent concentration. Juicy but quite simple.	13.5%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.sanvicentewinery.cl
Santa Helena, 100+ Parras Viejas, Colchagua Valley 2013	15.25 (84)	15.5	14.5	15.5	Promising notes of cassis, mint and sage dominate the bouquet. Chocolate flavours and sweet red fruit are woven in, which gives an element of warmth.	14.5%	2015-2017	£19.99	International Wine Shippers
Tabalí, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013	15.25 (84)	16	15.5	14.5	Leafy aromas together with dark fruit. The vibrant acidity is elegant and there's some concentration with firm tannins and a spectrum of ripe fruit.	14%	2015-2020	£9.95	Ann et Vin, Jolly Vintner, Stone Vine & Sun
Tarapacá, Gran Reserva Etiqueta Negra, Maipo Valley 2012	15.25 (84)	16.5	14.5	14.5	Graceful with notes of blackberries, dark chocolate, coconut and a hint of tar. The tannins are a bit grippy but they are surrounded by lush fruit.	14.5%	2015-2020	£18.99	Laithwaites
Botalcura, La Porfia Gran Reserva, Central Valley 2012	15 (83)	15	15.5	14.5	Aromas are restrained, showing notes of ripe juicy dark fruits and a hint of sweet spices. Sturdy and quite firm – has a stiff upper lip.	13.5%	2015-2017	£14.99	JH Wines
Butron-Budinich, Cumbres Andinas Reserve, Rancagua, Cachapoal 2013	15 (83)	16.5	14	14.5	Exotic and unexpected aromas of dried herbs and Turkish Delight as well as spicy and peppery notes. Elegant and concentrated if a bit strange.	14%	2015-2020	N/A UK	www.bbww.cl
Carmen, Gran Reserva, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley 2012	15 (83)	14.25	15	15.5	Ripe cassis with an underlying prune character. Lovely juicy fruit underpinned by fresh acidity. Not bad but could be better.	14.5%	2015-2016	£11-£15 (2011)	Corking Wines, Exel Wines, Great Wines Direct, Strictly Wine, The Drink Shop
Indomitá, Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2014	15 (83)	15.5	14.5	15	Purity and concentration is the name of the game here. On the palate it is dry, balanced by fresh acidity.	14%	2015-2016	£8.99	Bennetts
Punti Ferrer, Gran Reserva, Curicó Valley 2012	15 (83)	15	15.5	14.5	Lively and elegant with aromas of black cherries, blackberries and a hint of spiciness. Green plums and chocolate flavour the palate.	14.5%	2015-2018	N/A UK	www.puntiferrer.cl
Valle Secreto, First Edition, Cachapoal Valley 2012	15 (83)	15.5	15	14.5	Dark, brooding herbal aromas with chocolate and tar. Some good concentration, velvety texture and a wonderful length.	14.5%	2015-2020	£15.50	EWGA, Heritage Wine, Wine Time
Veramonte, Colchagua Valley 2013	15 (83)	15	15	15	Approachable notes of blackberries, cassis and a hint of herbaceousness. Fairly fluid and juicy with a notable alcoholic kick on the finish.	14.5%	2015-2020	£8.99	Matthew Clark

**Fair** 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)  
■ Bisquertt, Ecos de Rulo, Marchigue, Colchagua Valley 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Canepa, Finísimo, Marchigüe, Colchagua Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Casa Donoso, Evolución Reserva, Maule Valley 2014 14.75 (82) ■ Cremaschi Furlotti, Reserva, Loncomilla, Maule Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Hugo Casanova, Reserva, Maule Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Lagar de Bezana, Alto Cachapoal, Cachapoal Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Lapostolle, Cuvée Alexandre, Apalta, Colchagua Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Mancura, Guardián Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013 14.75 (82) ■ Viña Requingua, Potro de Piedra, Curicó Valley 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Viña Requingua, Toro de Piedra Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2012 14.75 (82) ■ Viña San Esteban, In Situ Gran Reserva, Aconcagua Valley 2013

14.75 (82) ■ Chocalán, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013 14.5 (81) ■ Kadil, Tierra Mapuche, Rapel 2011 14.5 (81) ■ Porta, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013 14.5 (81) ■ Santa Alicia, Gran Reserva de los Andes, Pirque, Maipo Valley 2012 14.5 (81) ■ Viña Santa Cruz, Chamán Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2012 14.5 (81) ■ Alto de Casablanca, Primus, Maipo Valley 2013 14.25 (80+) ■ Concha y Toro, Marques de Casa Concha, Maipo Valley 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Emiliana, Signos de Origen, Los Morros, Maipo Valley 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Morandé, Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Siegel, Special Reserve, Colchagua Valley 2013 14.25 (80+) ■ William Cole Vineyards, Columbine Special Reserve, Maipo Valley 2012 14.25 (80+) ■ Cucao, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2011 14 (80) ■ De Martino, Las Aguilas, Maipo Valley

2011 14 (80) ■ J Bouchon, Block Series Reserva Especial, Maule Valley 2012 14 (80) ■ Sutil, Canto de Piedra Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2013 14 (80)

**Poor** 11-12.75pts (70-75+pts)  
■ Agustinos, Gran Terroir, La Huella, Maipo Valley 2013 13.75 (79) ■ Marks & Spencer, Pirque Estate, Maipo Valley 2012 13 (76) ■ San José de Apalta, Single Vineyard, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2012 12.75 (75+)

**Faulty**  
■ Aresti, Family Collection Limited Edition, Curicó Valley 2001 (corked)

For full UK stockist details, see p103 ➤

## My top three

Jo Ahearne MW

### ■ Arboleda, Aconcagua Valley 2012

A sustainable viticulture project from the Vertientes sub-zone of Aconcagua Valley which is 40km inland and at an altitude of 380m-590m. Both these aspects help retain freshness and enable the grapes to ripen slowly to give a polished tannic structure. The 5% Cabernet Franc adds purity and a leafy note. **17/20 (90/100) Drink 2015-2018**

### ■ Vistamar, Sepia Reserva, Maipo Valley

**2013** Irene Paiva has woven some magic in this great-value wine. The Maipo soils are well drained which keeps the vigour of the vines in check. Despite a warm climate, Paiva has managed to teased out fresh eucalyptus and mint flavours. Great concentration for the price. **16.5 (88) Drink 2015-2018**

### ■ Tres Palacios, Cholqui, Maipo Valley

**2012** Cholqui is a cool sub-region of Maipo just 40km from the sea. The winemaking here is a more Old World style with a mix of savoury and ripe fruit characteristics. Really elegant. **16.5 (88) Drink 2015-2018**

## My top three

Peter Richards MW

### ■ Ventisquero, Enclave, Pirque, Maipo

**Valley 2011** By far and away my highest mark of the tasting. This wine hints at a new dawn for Chilean Cabernet, where intrigue, finesse and savoury rather than sweet flavours predominate. The incredibly fine-boned yet exponential tannins alone are a thing of beauty in themselves. **19/20 (96/100) Drink 2015-2022**

### ■ Corney & Barrow, Rosario, Central

**Valley 2014** Not my highest score but it deserves singling out for its fantastic value. Bright, cheerful and winning: proper user-friendly Chilean Cab: wonderfully drinkable, cleverly made. **17 (90) Drink 2015-2020**

### ■ Cono Sur, 20 Barrels, Maipo Valley 2013

More fêted for its Pinot and Riesling, Cono Sur has recently upped its game on the Cabernet front, also releasing Silencio, a new prestige cuvée. I love the accent on freshness: From a tricky year, it's young but approachable now, but you can keep it for a few years too. **17 (90) Drink 2015-2020**

## My top three

Dirceu Vianna Jr MW

### ■ Casas del Bosque, Gran Bosque, Reserva Privada, Alto Maipo, Maipo Valley

**2012** I have long admired this dynamic team of winemakers who also make very good Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. A great vineyard, strict selection, gentle extraction and judicious use of oak combine to build this exuberant and harmonious wine. **17.5/20 (91/100) Drink 2015-2022**

### ■ Anakena, Alwa Limited Edition, Cachapoal Valley 2010

The two childhood friends behind this 16-year-old project are ambitious, and it shows. Grapes are sourced from their own vineyard in the high sector of Cachapoal Valley. The wine is modern and expressive with dark fruits, chocolate and exotic spices. **17 (90) Drink 2015-2022**

### ■ William Fèvre Chile, Gran Cuvée,

**Pirque, Maipo Valley 2011** Chilean Cab with a lighter touch. Bravo for pursuing elegance and restraint over exuberance and power! A sophisticated wine from a single vineyard called Las Majadas in the Andes foothills. It has refined tannins underpinned by a lovely fresh acidity and an attractive savoury note on the finish. **17 (90) Drink 2015-2017**

**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

## Expert summary: Peter Richards MW

Chile's producers need to change their mindset – and the location of their vineyards – and treat Cabernet Sauvignon as a quality grape before the wines can improve



**Peter Richards MW** is DWWA Regional Chair for Chile and the author of *The Wines of Chile* and *Chile Wine Brief*

NO OUTSTANDING WINES and nearly a third of all entries rated merely Fair does not make for encouraging reading (just as sampling all 86 wines didn't make for easy tasting). Chile, on this verdict, needs to re-think its approach to a grape variety that is the bedrock of its wine production, accounting as it does for a third of total output.

But this is nothing new. When we rated Maipo Cabernets two years ago (June 2013 issue), only 57% of wines tasted were rated as Recommended or above, whereas this tasting raised that figure to 65%. Conceivably, you could read this as an improvement of sorts. Certainly, there did seem to be a welcome shift away from overdoing things, in terms of ripeness, extraction, oak and even eucalypt character.

Clearly, however, more needs to be done to transform the Cinderella of the Chilean wine scene. My fellow judges and I commented on the number of faulty wines. Beyond this, the main culprit was a stultifying uniformity of style: a lack of diversity and thrill. Was this down to the searingly hot 2012 vintage, which accounted for nearly half of the wines on show and resulted in baked, homogenised styles? Perhaps. Though there were clearly decent wines made in 2012 (including our top scorer) and it seems too simplistic to allocate the blame this narrowly.

Of the producers, it's worth noting that very few of the big hitters among Chile's Cabernet elite bottlings were

present. (Entry criteria specified one wine per producer of a minimum 85% Cabernet.) But it's clear that producers all over Chile are making decent Cabernet, just as there's a similar spread making depressing wines. Geography and mindset both need to be right for the equation to tally.

Nevertheless, it was Chile's classic Cabernet terroir, home to many of its brightest stars, which shone through. Alto Maipo – the stony vineyards on the lower skirts of the Andes foothills – produced three of the four top-scoring wines (although, interestingly, none of those producers is actually based in that region). In fact, the broader Maipo region accounted for nearly half of all the wines rated as Recommended or Highly Recommended.

In general, the quality of the 2011 vintage shone, as did 2010 though to a lesser extent because of fewer wines. The 2013 vintage also looked promising. It would be nice to include in a future tasting some more mature vintages of wines that had been designed for ageing, as well as an estate's current release. **D**

*'The main culprit was a stultifying uniformity of style: a lack of diversity and thrill'*