

Chile's new-wave winemakers

Chile is no longer a backwater nation churning out cheap, dull wines. As Peter Richards MW explains, a new breed of adventurous winemakers are blazing a brave, exciting – and refreshing – trail that will make the rest of the world take notice

COMMON LORE HAS it that a competition took place in the 1920s among colleagues on *The Times* to devise the most accurate yet boring headline. The winner was Claud Cockburn with: 'Small earthquake in Chile, not many dead'.

The image of Chile as a conservative, parochial and (whisper it) rather dull nation has proved remarkably resilient, especially in wine circles. But while there is, as ever, some truth to the stereotype, these days it's either hopelessly simplistic or wilfully ignorant to intone the received opinion that Chile is simply a nation specialising in cheap and cheerful 'Merlot' or a country in thrall to the large-scale, traditional producers.

To those people, I say: go and visit. Spend proper time walking among the craggy bush vines below scudding clouds of the south. Drink uproariously

with the sun-weathered viticulturists and natural wine producers. Run your fingers over the limestone sub-soil layers in coastal Limarí, then scale the breathless heights of the Elqui Valley.

Chile has changed. And continues to change at breakneck speed – with exhilarating results. The 10 producers that follow are a very personal selection, based on extensive tastings and visits over the past decade and more. They have one thing in common: they are doing things and making wines that quicken the pulse, injecting that X-factor into Chilean wine. There are others that didn't make the cut but are worthy of mention – Calyptra, SoldeSol, Garage Wine Co, Kingston, Tabalí, Tamaya, Casas del Bosque, Zaranda, Ayllu, Villalobos, Morandé, Matetic. But the 10 I've chosen over the following pages provide trailblazing excitement galore.

This page: the Falernia winery has vineyards all the way along the Elqui Valley, right up to the slopes of the Andes



Aristos, Cachapoal

For once, the fancy nomenclature rings true: there is an unquestionable nobility to the wines of Aristos. From the rich Burgundian stylings of the Duquesa Chardonnay to the filigree tannins of the Baron and Duque Cabernets, these are self-assured, bold wines that deliver on many levels.

Aristos is a meeting of powerful minds. Burgundian vintner Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, of the eponymous Vosne-Romanée property, met Chilean winemaker of French extraction François Massoc while they were studying in Burgundy. They subsequently joined forces with terroir-hunter Pedro Parra to make groundbreaking Chilean wines with an accent on terroir and refinement.

In the short few years of production to date, the results have been a huge success. And there is more to come – the team has planted unirrigated Pinot Noir on schist soils close to the coast in Bío Bío. For now, however, Aristos’ stellar ascent has made it one of Chile’s finest and most exciting producers.



Aristos, Duquesa d’A Grand Chardonnay du Chili, Cachapoal 2008 19.5/20pts (98/100pts)
£50.78–£62.50 **Justerini & Brooks, Slurp**
A new dimension for Chilean Chardonnay. Sensationally complex and savoury, with intense flavours of roasted nuts and tangy red apple. Both the alcohol and price are high on paper, but you resent neither in the tasting. Drink 2013–2015 **Alcohol** 14.5%

Aristos, Baron d’A Grand Vin du Chili, Cachapoal 2007 17.5 (91)
£29.28 **Justerini & Brooks**
A powerful, classic expression of Chilean Cabernet, but with a refreshing acidity and tannic elegance that sets it apart from the norm. (It also has a touch of Maipo Cabernet and coastal Syrah.) Peaty, figgy fruit flavours define a compact, dense palate profile with elegant maturity. **Drink** 2013–2015 **Alc** 13.5%

Bravado Wines, Casablanca

Felipe Garcia and Constanza (Connie) Schwaderer are the emerging power duo of the Chilean wine scene. I first encountered Garcia and Schwaderer in their previous positions at big wineries (Calina and Córpora, respectively). Now married and with children, these two thoughtful and ambitious winemakers launched Bravado Wines in 2006.

The pair describe themselves as ‘diehard foodies’, ‘dedicated drinkers of fine Champagne’ and ‘defenders of terroir’. Their elegant, expressive wines – which include some engaging Carignan-based reds from the south (Facundo and Vigno) and even a Burgundian Vougeot with help from Benjamin Leroux – bear them out.

Garcia and Schwaderer also acknowledge the commercial support they have received from UK online merchant Naked Wines, which champions independent winemakers. (Bravado is a loyal supporter of MOVI’s Movement of Independent Vintners [MOVI], which is an association for small producers.)



Above: François Massoc, with his partners at Aristos, make ‘groundbreaking’ terroir-driven wines of real elegance



Bravado, Marina Garcia Schwaderer Sauvignon Blanc, Casablanca 2012 17.5 (91)
£16.99 **Naked Wines**
Wonderfully cogent and limpid wine, dynamic in resonance but understated in flavour. Pure and clear, with tangy hints of pea shoots and peach. A deft combination of intensity and drinkability. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 13.5%

Bravado, Sofía García Schwaderer Pinot Noir, Casablanca 2011 17 (90)
£19.99 **Naked Wines**
As with the Sauvignon, there is a notable and welcome emphasis here on freshness and drinkability. Leafy, earthy, red fruit scents lead into a velvety, vital flavour profile suffused with black cherry and herbs. Perhaps some of Pinot’s sensuousness has been lost in the drive for freshness but its restraint is to be commended. **Drink** 2013–2015 **Alc** 13.5%

Casa Marin, San Antonio

Any selection of trailblazing Chilean wine producers would be incomplete without Casa Marin. Owner Mariluz Marin has excelled in challenging accepted norms in Chilean wine ever since she set up shop in 1997 in blustery Lo Abarca, coastal San Antonio (against the will of the government, her peers – and even the lady selling her the land). She was told it was too cold, too dry, too risky – even illegal – but Marin was dogged in her ambitions.

She has been vindicated by her consistently individual, often compelling wines. In the early days they tended to almost outrageous exuberance; recently they have settled down to acquire finesse as well as intensity.

I could happily have recommended any number of Marin’s wines, from the succulent Estero Sauvignon Gris to the haunting Miramar Syrah or the punchy Cipreses Sauvignon Blanc. And the innovation continues, courtesy of Marin’s son,

Above: before buying Casa Marin in San Antonio, Mariluz Marin was told by the government, her peers and even the landowner that making wine there was too risky. She’s consistently proven them wrong



Felipe, and the exciting new limestone-based Tierras Blancs vineyard just across the road.



Casa Marin, Miramar Vineyard Riesling, San Antonio 2010 18.5 (95)
£16–£17 **Mentzendorff, ND John, Noel Young, Slurp, Swig, Wimbledon Wine Cellar, Woodwinters**
The 2009 was sensational and now this 2010, produced in tiny quantities after the vineyard was hit by frost, is coming into its own. There’s an almost Austrian elegance to this Riesling: it’s broad but grounded, with toasty lime and effortless mineral refinement. **Drink** 2013–2020 **Alc** 12.5%

Casa Marin, Laurel Sauvignon Blanc, San Antonio 2010 18 (93)
£17 **ND John, Soho Wine Supply Co, Wimbledon Wine Cellar, The Vintage House, Upton Upon Severn Wines**
Vigorous, exuberant and beguiling, this fiercely individual Sauvignon is succulent and utterly

invigorating. Flavours of cooked asparagus, pink grapefruit and honey combine with dynamic intensity to excellent effect. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 13.5%

Clos des Fous, Cachapoal

Many of Chile’s most exciting new ventures are youthful collaborations. It’s a refreshing concept in a Chilean wine industry whose upper echelons have traditionally had a somewhat exclusive, old-boy feel to them. Clos des Fous is a working partnership between terroir specialist Pedro Parra, winemaker François Massoc (both also involved in Aristos, *see opposite page*), viticulturist Paco Leyton and businessman Albert Cussen.

The concept is to eschew the mainstream Chilean styles and explore extreme terroirs – hence the winery’s name, meaning ‘Vineyards of the Crazy Men’. Expressive Pinot Noir from Traiguén, an inky field blend from Cauquenes, a Chilean homage to Chablis, rugged mountain-grown

‘Clos des Fous’ aim is to explore extreme terroirs – hence the winery’s name, meaning “Vineyards of the Crazy Men”





Above: terroir expert Pedro Parra and viticulturist Paco Leyton are half of the ‘crazy’ team at Clos des Fous, an exciting new venture in Cachapoal

Cabernet – such are the vehicles with which Clos des Fous challenges assumptions about Chile. While some of the wines aren’t quite the finished article yet, this is without doubt a venture with a great future ahead of it.

Clos des Fous, Locura 1 Chardonnay, Cachapoal 2011 17 (90)

£12.99 **widely available via Liberty Wines**

A Chilean take on Chablis. The style is understated, with hints of apple, apricot and a flinty quality. The flavours are all about crispness and a herbal, tangy lift – it speaks of icy nights and invigorating mountain air. Stylish and classy. **Drink** 2013–2015 **Aic** 14%



Clos des Fous, Grillos Cantores Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Cachapoal 2011 16.5 (88)

£12.99 **widely available via Liberty Wines**

What I love about this wine, even though it’s not the most complex or brilliantly articulated expression of Cabernet, is its nerve and pared-back beauty. From its leafy blackcurrant aromas to the firm yet juicy palate profile, this is a fresh and fine red, the product of honest winemaking and a cool mountainous terroir. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Aic** 14%

De Martino, Maipo

As the sun beats down on a bright Chilean summer’s day outside, winemaker Marcelo Retamal is in a ruminant mood in the tasting room. ‘It’s complex and risky,’ he concedes, rubbing his chin, ‘not to mention stressful’.

We are discussing his brave and wholesale change from the 2011 vintage to minimise what he terms ‘standardising forces’ in winemaking: henceforth early, not late harvests; no more new barrels (only used ones, plus large wooden foudres bought from Austria, and earthenware *tinaja* jars); no cultured yeast, enzymes or micro-oxygenation; just an accent on linear, food-friendly wines.



‘Marcelo Retamal is fond of quoting his favourite band, Iron Maiden: “If you’re gonna die, die with your boots on”’ **Peter Richards MW on De Martino’s winemaker (pictured above)**

‘It’s easy making wines where you harvest late and adjust in the winery,’ he comments. ‘This way is far riskier’. But then Retamal – known respectfully as *el doctor* by his fellow winemakers – has never been afraid of pushing boundaries. Championing terroirs across the Chilean landscape, from high-altitude Elqui to ancient field blends in the south, he is undoubtedly one of Chile’s most hard-working, influential, innovative and admirable winemakers. Retamal is fond of quoting his favourite band, Iron Maiden: ‘If you’re gonna die, die with your boots on.’

Next on Retamal’s agenda? A new natural-style orange Muscat from Itata.



De Martino, Viejas Tinajas Cinsault, Itata 2011 17.5 (91)

£8.95–£10.50 **Les Caves de Pyrène, Slurp, The Wine Society**

Earthy, cherry scents with floral notes: pure and uplifting. Made in large earthenware jars, with minimal intervention, it is unadorned and beautiful for it – crunchy and utterly moreish. **Drink** 2013 **Aic** 13%

De Martino, Reserva Legado Carmenere, Maipo 2011 17 (90)

£8–£11.49 **Harvey Nichols, L’Art du Vin, Les Caves de Pyrène, Oddbins, Park Vintners, Slurp, The Wine Society**

Encapsulating De Martino’s new direction, this Carmenere is vibrant and well judged. It’s characterful, typical, but not overwhelming. **Drink** 2013 **Aic** 13.5%

Falernia, Elqui

I was on the judging panel in 2005 which propelled Falernia into the spotlight by naming its Rhône-like Syrah ‘best in show’ in a prominent Chilean wine competition. Until then, the Elqui Valley had been known primarily for its Pisco brandy, famous poets and alien sightings. Afterwards, Elqui, Syrah and Falernia were on everyone’s lips.

The winery – which also makes the Mayu brand – is a venture between two cousins of Italian heritage. Aldo Olivier is a local Elqui landowner, while Giorgio Flessati is a larger-than-life flying winemaker with a seemingly magic touch.

Elqui is an entrancing place. A dramatic, steep-sided valley, it has a vibrant local fruit industry and a laid-back way of life. Falernia has vineyards all the way along the valley, from its breezy limestone beginnings to the breathless altitude of its craggy Andean east. All of this natural potential (allied to Flessati’s skill) makes for a diverse, engaging portfolio, from delightful dry PX to ripasso-esque Carmenere, tangy Sauvignon – and of course the emblematic, scented Syrah.



Falernia, Syrah, Elqui 2010 18 (93)

£8.50 **Field & Fawcett, Great Western Wine, Slurp, South American Wines Online, Tanners**

Vivid, evocative Syrah bursting with engaging flavours of tapenade, black pepper and rich dark fruit. This spicy, savoury style is tailor-made for venison or game dishes. Superb value. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Aic** 14%

Viña Mayu, Sangiovese, Elqui Valley 2011 18 (93)

£6.48 **Asda, Guy Anderson**

The Italian know-how shines through in this characterful but stylish Sangiovese. Dried cherry and roasted herb flavours come together in a succulent, elegantly textured flavour profile. Great value. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Aic** 14.2%

Laberinto, Maule

The rangy, tousle-haired Rafael Tirado is perhaps best known for his former role as long-term winemaker at Veramonte in Casablanca. Little did we know that all that time he was nurturing a

small-scale, off-the-grid wine project in the uplands of eastern Maule in a glorious setting on the banks of the Colbún reservoir.

Tirado joined forces with his father-in-law, Georg Andresen, in 1993, using the latter’s holiday home to plant half a hectare of Cabernet Sauvignon. ‘We wanted to make some decent wine,’ he says, before adding, crucially: ‘We had total liberty to experiment and get it wrong.’

That freedom of expression is the key to Laberinto’s appeal. For example, Tirado has planted some vineyards in a labyrinth formation – partly to experiment with different exposures to promote complexity but also for an aesthetic buzz and to make an intellectual point. He says that imposing excessive order on a plant as ‘chaotic’ as the vine troubles him. So he built a replica of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth – the idea of a pilgrimage appealed. ‘I’ve had some of my most important chats with my children there,’ he reflects.

While Tirado also has Pinot Noir, País, Syrah, Merlot and Cabernet, it’s his mineral, sinewy Sauvignon Blanc that demands attention.



Laberinto, Cenizas de Barlovento Sauvignon Blanc, Maule 2011 17.5 (91)

£16.99 **Naked Wines**

The standard-bearer for southern Chilean Sauvignon Blanc, this intensely tangy white is piercing and invigorating: a lean marathon runner rather than a body builder. Its diaphanous charm and citric structure bring to mind stones, earth and landscape rather than fruit. Ageworthy and groundbreaking. **Drink** 2013–2016 **Aic** 12.5%

Louis-Antoine Luyt, Maule

Louis-Antoine Luyt originally came to Chile in 1998 to escape the ennui of his native France and practise his Spanish. Apart from the odd trip back to his motherland to study wine and work vintages with the likes of Jacques Lardière at Louis Jadot ➤

Below: Laberinto is a small-scale wine project in the uplands of eastern Maule, set on the banks of the Colbún reservoir



‘Montsecano is undoubtedly a trailblazing Chilean producer, making wines that quicken the pulse’

and Marcel and Mathieu Lapierre at Domaine Lapierre in Burgundy, Luyt has been there ever since. After starting out in Chile working as a dishwasher, Luyt caught the wine bug. Training as a sommelier, he noticed how ‘homogenous’ Chilean wine was and resolved to work with the country’s old-vine heritage in the south to make wines with a point of difference. His initial venture, Clos Ouvert, lost the majority of its stock in the 2010 earthquake and his partners backed out. He then pushed forward with his own, eponymously named wines that are worked organically and with minimal intervention. For all the labelling of his wines as ‘natural’, Luyt himself tends to use terms such as, ‘fun’, ‘purity’ and ‘instinct’. While his wines are edgy, inevitably polarising opinion, his indomitable and innovative spirit is undoubtedly a positive influence in Chile.



Louis-Antoine Luyt, Trequilemu Carignan Empedrado, Maule 2010 17 (90)
£15–£19 **D Byrne, Les Caves de Pyrène, Slurp, Swig**
It’s natural, all right! Feral, floral, unashamedly wild and funky, this Carignan nonetheless has a juicy density to it that’s engaging and food-friendly. **Drink** 2013 **Alc** 12.9%

Louis-Antoine Luyt, Quenehuao Pinot Noir Empedrado, Maule 2010 16.5 (88)
£22.99 **Les Caves de Pyrène, Swig**
Bold, leafy, malty and earthy aromas swirl around the glass. Edgy stuff. It’s brisk, verging on sour, but in its gently abrasive, rustic style it’s also honest and really quite moreish. Great with tuna steak or charcuterie. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 13%

Montsecano, Casablanca
One of the more imaginative tasters with whom I first sampled Montsecano’s Pinot Noir memorably described the wine as being ‘totally original – it smells like cocaine, or good Vosne-Romanée’. While I’m not sure I wholeheartedly do (or can) agree, Montsecano is undoubtedly a trailblazing Chilean producer, making wines that quicken the pulse. This joint venture between landowner Julio Donoso and renowned Alsace producer André Ostertag is totally on-trend in its approach, planted in super-coastal Casablanca hillsides near Las Dichas and featuring biodynamic viticulture, Nomblot concrete egg vats, geese and a healthy obsession with Pinot Noir. The six-hectare project started in 2005, the first vintage was 2008, and small quantities of two Pinot Noir wines are made. Refugio is the simpler, more

Photograph: Matt Wilson/Cephas



Above: Giorgio Flessati, the winemaker at Falernia in Elqui, is described by Peter Richards MW as having ‘the magic touch’

easygoing of the two; the grand vin (below) is altogether more muscular and individual.



Montsecano, Pinot Noir, Casablanca 2011 17 (90)
£30–£36 **Fields Morris & Verdin, Slurp**
I’ve had some bottle variation with this 2011 vintage – perhaps to be expected with this kind of minimal-intervention wine – but at its best it is beautifully textured, with earthy, gamey hints and layers of wild berry fruit. Food friendly, vigorous and engaging. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 13%

Viña Leyda, Leyda, San Antonio
This well known and rightly lauded producer has been around for a while, so it’s tempting to think of it as part of the settled Chilean winescape. But this would be an oversight. Because, to this day, Viña Leyda remains true to the spirit of the pioneering partners who first founded it – and who built an 8km pipeline for essential irrigation to make it happen. The sheer ambition of those trailblazers forged an impressive legacy in putting the Leyda and wider San Antonio appellations on the map. Witness the 2012 Decanter World Wine Awards, where Leyda wines won five of Chile’s 10 Trophies, (including three International Trophies).





Above: Viña Leyda's success today is thanks to the pioneering founders who built an 8km pipeline from the Maipo River to irrigate the vineyards

Today, Viña Leyda continues to push boundaries by making exhilarating wine within an increasingly varied range. Serious rosé, expressive Pinot Noir, structured Sauvignon Gris, crunchy Riesling, elegant Chardonnay – even now traditional method fizz – all make for a laudable line-up. What's more, the two wines featured below are absolute gems.

Viña Leyda, Reserva Syrah, Leyda Valley 2010 19 (96)

£6.99–£10.45 **Great Western Wine, Majestic, Slurp**

An everyday staple in the Richards household, this spicy, harmonious Syrah is refreshing and moreish. Flavours of black pepper, wood smoke and ripe dark fruit are sustained by vivid acidity and framed by elegant tannin. Outstanding value. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 14%



Viña Leyda, Garuma Sauvignon Blanc, San Antonio 2012 17.5 (91)

£8.50–£11.50 **Aged in Oak, Great Western Wine, Invinity Wines, Noel Young, South American Wines Online, Slurp, Swig, The Wine Society**

The hot 2012 vintage wasn't the best for whites, but this wine is a perennial over-achiever. Elegant notes of fennel, grapefruit and mineral hints define the nose; on the palate it has real presence and structure with layered citrus and herbal flavours. Delicious. **Drink** 2013–2014 **Alc** 13.5% **D**

For full details of UK stockists, see p86

Peter Richards MW is author of The Wines of Chile and is the Regional Chair for Chile at the Decanter World Wine Awards. He has his own website at www.susieandpeter.com

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