



ILLUSTRATION BY HELEN RICHARDS

CHILE WINE BRIEF

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'CHILE LIES AT THE END OF ALL ROADS'

wrote the novelist Isabel Allende. It's certainly far-flung, remote even – but this spindly South American country is also one of the most dynamic and exciting wine nations on earth right now. The wine that flows from its hills and valleys merits close attention because it is showing tantalising glimpses of a compelling, multi-faceted future. Hence this, the first ever Chile Wine Brief. Welcome!

THE AUTHOR

Peter Richards is a writer, broadcaster and Master of Wine. Peter's award-winning work takes him all around the world and his regular BBC TV and radio appearances, writing and events mean his engaging, informed style is familiar to many. Peter is also a fluent Spanish speaker and renowned authority on Chilean wine – his book *The Wines of Chile* was described as, 'Magnificent: the best book on Chilean wine to date'. You can find out more on his website www.susieandpeter.com.

I've been captivated by Chile since working as a journalist there in the late 1990s, when I started covering the wine scene. I've visited almost annually since, to keep up to date (and enjoy some proper pisco sours). A book (*The Wines of Chile*), a Master of Wine Dissertation, thousands of wines and words later, and I still can't dance the cueca. But I do have a feel for Chilean wine in the global context – hence my opening remarks.

Consider this document like a peek behind the scenes of Chilean wine: a well informed briefing dossier that brings you bang up to date with all the latest key information. It's not intended to be exhaustive (I make reference elsewhere to the best other sources to consult) and is unashamedly opinionated, pithy and

personal. It's therefore inevitably limited and somewhat homespun – but hopefully this is what makes it worthwhile too. It is intended for everyone from producers to the global wine trade to students and everyday wine lovers: anyone with an interest in being ahead of the curve and enjoying delicious Chilean wine. The design and marketing is deliberately different, as is my approach to rating wines, for reasons I outline in that section. The idea is to make this a regular publication, to keep up with the rapid pace of change in Chilean wine.

I very much hope you enjoy it.

Peter Richards MW

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TALKING POINTS

‘If we open a quarrel between
past and present, we shall find
that we have lost the future.’
Winston Churchill

Something old, something new

Chile has been criticised in the past for being boring, predictable and limited in its wine offering. In the nineties and early noughties it was a valid charge – but no longer. Chile is one of the most dynamic wine nations on earth; the sheer pace of change, innovation and advancement is astonishing. (It also makes life difficult for writers, whose work dates fast.) New vineyards keep popping up in all sorts of extreme and unexpected places – from Toconao in the heart of the Atacama Desert to Chile Chico in the ice-strewn south. Stylistic diversification continues apace, with sparkling, sweet and ‘natural’ wines increasingly common, even fortified and flor-aged wines popping up on the grid. Proud winemakers display their new toys including concrete eggs, stainless steel barrels, earthenware tinaja pots and large oak vats (instead of small oak barrels). But it’s not just about novelty. One of the most exciting trends in Chile of late has been the revival of the country’s winemaking heritage, from old-vine Carignan, Cinsault, Muscat and País in the south to the sweet pajarete of the north. I was recently served, by way of introduction to Santa Carolina’s heritage programme, a 1967 Macul Cabernet. It was glorious. Respecting and reviving the past will be vital for Chile’s future.

Hit the sustain pedal

Being business-minded folk, Chileans aren’t the most natural guardians of the earth. (The copper and wood industries, some of Chile’s largest earners, exact a harsh toll on the environment.)

Its wine industry, however, needs to do better. This is a country with enviable natural advantages for making wine and it needs to harness and exploit these better. In a country with relatively low pest and disease pressure, vineyard practices need to be more enlightened and sustainable (going organic or biodynamic are just some ways of doing this). One of the key challenges to the industry’s sustainability is vine longevity: too many vineyards are being replanted prematurely due to disease or poor planting. ‘To make great wines we need mature vines but our vineyards are farmed by Neanderthals,’ is one winemaker’s scathing yet plaintive assessment. Another notes how some of the country’s best vineyards are those using, ‘zero viticulture – which means we’ve been getting it wrong.’ There’s no doubt that sustainability is finally on the agenda both on an industry-wide and individual producer level in Chile. But more can be done.



The big alcohol debate

‘It’s simple,’ said one winemaker to me, frustrated because I’d criticised his wine for being too alcoholic. ‘Just drink less of it!’ I make no bones about the fact I prefer wines with less alcohol – I like my wine and want to be able to enjoy a decent amount without falling off my chair. Moreover, the combination of ripe, sweet fruit flavours with lowish acidity and raspingly high alcohol – while impressive – can also be monotonous and simplistic. I want a wine to whisper sweet nothings, not scream inanities. It’s true that Chile naturally tends to make a generous rather than lean wine style. But to hear winemakers extolling the virtues of lowering alcohol by reverse osmosis machines (as I did recently in Chile) or discussing adding water (only ever ‘theoretically’ because it’s illegal) is disappointing and misguided. A better long-term solution is simply to plant vineyards in cooler areas or harvest earlier. From the 2011 vintage, Marcelo Retamal at De Martino is harvesting his reds on average a month earlier than before, in the search for lower alcohols, better balance and less ‘standardisation by over-ripeness’. Initial results are encouraging and not only from a quality perspective – Retamal reports that, because early harvests mean less dehydration, his fruit yields up to 30% more juice. So there’s an economic incentive to naturally lower alcohol wines, too.

Set the winemakers free!

Chilean wine has one of the most consolidated producer bases in the world. While this makes sound commercial sense, the country could use more personality in its wines and marketing. It needs more small-scale, niche producers prepared to champion more edgy, potentially thrilling and esoteric wine styles. This is what gets wine connoisseurs excited and produces a halo effect for the rest of the industry. One of the most efficient ways to diversify the producer base is by giving the country's most experienced practitioners (ie the senior winemakers in the big wineries) more leeway either to develop sub-brands or to cultivate their own mini ventures on the side. Chile's new generation of winemakers is finally finding its voice – they are young enough not to be stuck in their ways but sufficiently experienced to understand their vines and the wider world of wine. Owners and shareholders need to trust them and give them not only greater freedom in their work but also more prominence on the global stage. Energised winemakers, and the wines they make, will then become the most eloquent ambassadors for the country, creating a unique identity in the process – and making sound commercial sense too.

Name and gain

The Chilean wine denomination system needs changing (or, in fact, re-creating). As it stands, Decree 464, which delimits Chile's wine regions, is designed for and by bureaucrats not winemakers. In 2011 an amendment was passed introducing a tripartite division allowing producers to use the Costa, Entre Cordilleras or Andes monikers on their labels. While this system is flawed (from the nomenclature to the divisions themselves) its value is the precedent it sets for change. What Chile desperately needs now is a system of small-scale areas (*localidades* – like Apalta, Quebrada Seca, Lo Abarca or Los Lingues) it can write into its wine law, to make it mean something for the wines and establish the fundamentals for a proper wine map. It's too soon for a full-blown European-style appellation system with regulations on yield, varieties and so forth. Any system introduced at this stage needs in-built flexibility for a future still in development. But if Chile is serious about investing in its long-term fine wine credentials, it needs government and growers to work together to establish these denominations as soon as possible. In the meantime, valuable time is being wasted while wine drinkers familiarise themselves with other fine wine areas around the world – but not Chile's.

Wanna be in my gang?

Parochial rivalry is a disease in Chile. It continues to inhibit collective enterprise and innovation. That said, the younger generation is making progress. Initiatives like MOVI, VIGNO, Chanchos Deslenguados and Top Winemakers are groupings of forward-thinking wine folk prepared to work together for a greater good. Inasmuch as they are helping to build a constructive alternative image to Chilean wine and fostering the collective spirit, they are welcome. But when they lapse into stone-throwing and ranty self-indulgence, it becomes counter-productive. Chile needs its wine people to work together responsibly and with the collective

TALK - ING POINTS

TALK - ING POINTS

long-term good in mind. This is not just an internal, but an external task. It includes forging links with other wine industries all around the world. Encouraging winemaker exchange programmes, creating international promotional associations and initiatives – even establishing a South American Wine Summit – would greatly help Chile's standing on the world wine stage. It would also help it focus on the big picture rather than the petty stuff.



Less is more

So said architect Mies van der Rohe (and poet Robert Browning before him). To which consultant winemaker Alberto Antonini adds an important caveat: to do less, you need to know more. Chile finds itself at an exciting stage in its vinous development when the foundations have been laid for the creation of truly fine wines (promising terroirs, good plant material, experienced yet dynamic winemakers). Now all that's needed is patience, and the confidence to do less rather than more. It's easy to write, less easy to practise.

Water, water somewhere

Water shortages in Chile are no laughing matter. The country's reserves are running at a severe deficit, with implications for everything from agriculture to power (hydroelectric supplies nearly half the country's energy and is currently running at a 12-year low). Vineyards are being left to wither in Limarí and there are now moratoria on new plantings in many regions, especially coastal and northern ones, because new water rights will not be granted. And yet one winemaker I spoke to reported that, when he'd consulted an irrigation specialist from the Middle East, one of the most water-deprived regions of the world, the specialist had laughed. Chile has more than enough water, he'd said, it just needs to be retained and used more efficiently. There's an exposed rock face a few metres underground in Lapostolle's Apalta winery; it has never been dry (and this in a warm area). In the coming years, fresh water is likely to replace oil as the globe's most precious liquid resource. Chile's government and growers need to invest

now to manage its supplies more efficiently. The wine industry also needs to develop vineyards further south, where rain is more plentiful and dry farming (ie cultivation without irrigation) is feasible.

Hail the kingmakers

Consultants get a bad rap. Sometimes, it's justified, for example when their role is primarily to lend a famous name to a bottle while essentially neutering the product. Chile has had mixed success with consultants and foreign input (some just get carried away and encourage deplorable excess) but lately things have been looking up. The likes of Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, Alberto Antonini, Benjamin Leroux and Matt Thomson are all names that fill wine lovers' ears with optimism. Moreover, the home-grown talent has never been better. Leading this charge is terroir consultant and producer Pedro Parra, who has helped inspire a generation of winemakers to broaden their minds and search for the 'X-factor' in Chilean wine. Other names worthy of recognition include Alvaro Peña, Claudio Pastene, Yerko Moreno and Eduardo Silva. What Chilean winemakers need to craft great wines is an in-depth global perspective allied to an almost obsessive local focus. Whether foreign or home-grown, consultants can help in this task – they just need to be good.



Pedro Parra

Pop those corks

Excellent news: Descorchados will shortly be available in English. 'The bible', as it is affectionately known by its writers (and some Chile wine watchers, this author included), will be launched English-style in March 2014 in iBook format for tablets and iPads. For those unfamiliar with this annual guide, it compiles the tasting highlights of a team working under respected journalist Patricio Tapia and sommelier Héctor Riquelme. It's grown into one of the most worthwhile and influential publications not only on the Chilean wine scene but now also covering Argentina and Uruguay.

TALK - ING POINTS

CHILE WINE BRIEF

FACTS AND FIGURES

Chilean wine : The headlines

Total wine production (2013):
1.28 billion litres

Total wine vineyard (2011):
125,946 hectares

Export value, bottled wine (May 2012-May 2013):
US\$1.56 billion (FOB)

Export volume, bottled wine (May 2012-May 2013):
53.43 million cases

Top export destinations:
UK, US, Brazil, Japan, Holland, China, Canada, Ireland, Russia, Denmark

(Sources: SAG, Intelvid)



Year	Vineyard area (hectares)	Production (million litres)
1996	56,004	382
1997	63,550	431
1998	75,388	527
1999	85,357	428
2000	103,876	642
2001	106,971	545
2002	108,569	562
2003	110,096	668
2004	112,056	630
2005	114,448	789
2006	116,793	845
2007	117,559	828
2008	104,717*	869
2009	111,525	1,009
2010	116,831	915
2011	125,946	1,063

* A new registration system was introduced in 2008 which affected the way vineyards in the south were accounted for; inconsistencies were finally ironed out in the 2011 census.

Grape variety	Production (litres)	% of total
Cabernet Sauvignon	372,156,140	35.2
Sauvignon Blanc	159,881,099	15.1
Merlot	128,562,105	12.1
Carmenere	96,054,191	9.1
Chardonnay	93,793,112	8.9
Syrah	79,113,112	7.5
Pinot Noir	26,160,902	2.5
Pais	18,310,152	1.7
Moscatel de Alejandria	17,609,627	1.7
PX	17,078,006	1.6
Others	49,891,504	4.7
TOTAL	1,058,609,950	100

FACTS AND FIGURES

Chilean wine : The data

Chilean wine vineyard and production

Production by grape variety

(2013, wines with Denominación de Origen)

FACTS AND FIGURES

Production by principal regions and grape varieties

(litres, 2013, wines with Denominación de Origen)

NB: these figures are for wines with DO, which account for 84% of production. However, the figures here are incomplete – only accounting for roughly half the total Chilean production (Maule, for example, is unusually low, while Colchagua is high). Nonetheless it does give an idea of production by variety across the regions.

REGION	Cabernet Sauvignon	Sauvignon Blanc	Merlot	Carmenere	Chardonnay	Syrah	Pinot Noir	Moscatel de Alejandria	TOTAL PRODUCTION
Elqui				326,637		166,315		555,213	1,048,165
Limari	1,101,570	576,547	9,700	422,326	1,055,619	1,187,440	35,350	571,168	8,591,321
Aconcagua	1,072,978	514,775	680,912	304,566	199,975	648,086	141,264		3,828,518
Casablanca	272,813	21,062,317	2,361,598	23,633	12,051,826	582,252	6,204,894		44,252,144
San Antonio		1,191,682	52,133		316,021	172,035	604,683		2,604,161
Maipo	23,852,279	6,169,828	6,148,102	2,417,023	5,626,741	7,691,593	414,502	90,276	54,414,533
Cachapoal	18,027,840	5,592,732	8,776,310	5,155,019	6,244,485	5,057,953	95,026		52,769,431
Colchagua	59,053,038	9,600,876	25,685,486	17,422,461	9,762,656	13,077,271	991,226	2,045	144,595,586
Curico	14,770,658	21,076,992	6,560,700	3,802,051	4,624,911	781,126	1,524,472	472,610	57,126,076
Maule	13,320,106	5,411,693	3,991,544	2,434,044	4,629,590	1,432,713	1,469,916	223,539	36,284,327
Itata	705,858	478,686	402,333	420,153	374,852	359,193	182,517	3,927,144	8,364,348
Bio Bio	7,850	594,831			745,219		1,243,802	9,620	3,169,563

Grape Variety	2011	2010	2009	2006	2003	2000	1997
Cabernet Sauvignon	40,837	38,426	40,728	40,789	39,731	35,967	15,995
Sauvignon Blanc	13,922	13,278	12,159	8,697	7,368	6,662	6,576
Merlot	11,432	10,640	10,041	13,368	12,879	12,824	5,411
Chardonnay	10,970	10,834	13,082	8,548	7,565	7,672	5,563
Carmenere	10,040	9,502	8,827	7,183	6,045	4,719	330
Syrah	7,393	6,887	6,027	3,370	2,468	2,039	201
Pais	7,079	5,855	3,868	14,955	14,953	15,180	15,241
Tintoreras	5,373	4,527	3,887	2,905	2,683	2,520	632
Pinot Noir	3,729	3,307	2,884	1,382	1,422	1,613	411
Moscatel de Alejandria	3,266	3,118	1,090	6,029	6,035	5,978	5,956
Malbec	1,828	1,489	1,264	1,027	951	929	501
Cabernet Franc	1,451	1,345	1,321	1,143	925	689	64
Others	8,626	7,623	6,347	7,396	7,072	7,084	6,669

NB: the above-mentioned change in recording system affected the 2009 and 2010 figures here, also the Pais and Moscatel numbers. Sauvignon Blanc figures may well include some Sauvignonasse/Sauvignon Vert. Likewise, Merlot figures may still include some Carmenere plantings. The dramatic rise in Carmenere figures reflects the fact that the variety was only officially identified in Chile in 1994 and Carmenere vineyards began to be re-registered from then. Tintoreras are used primarily to deepen the hue of red wines.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Grape varieties in Chile over time (hectares)

CHILE WINE BRIEF

GRAPE VARIETIES

Cabernet Sauvignon (40,837 hectares (ha), 32%)

Cab is the big boy on the Chilean wine campus. It accounts for a third of all Chilean wine output, including some bottles with stratospheric (for Chile) price tags. And yet, and yet. Great Cabernet needs scent and grace as well as structure and intensity. In too many cases, Chilean winemakers fail to deliver the former, focusing instead on the latter. Historic wines including Casa Real 1989, Medalla Real 1987, Estrella de Oro 1967, Señal 1997, Antiguas Reservas 1998 prove it can be done. My rallying cry to Chilean winemakers is: where are these wines of the future?

Sauvignon Blanc (13,922 ha, 11%)

Along with Syrah and Pinot, one of the sexiest varieties in Chile at the moment. San Antonio makes some of the best: superbly structured, dense and sometimes wild. But you can pretty much take your pick of coastal regions and pull out some thrilling Sauvignon. Huasco, Elqui, Limarí, Aconcagua Costa, Casablanca, Paredones – all of these make excellent Sauvignon in a variety of styles. You can even find good Sauvignon from high Andean sites (Calyptra's oaked version is superb, as is Laberinto's steely arrow) or in sweet wines from the south. My only caveat is that some producers doggedly persist making the far inferior variety Sauvignonasse or Sauvignon Vert (often in the 'central valley', at rock bottom prices) and labelling it Sauvignon Blanc. This is gross misrepresentation and should be outlawed.



GRAPE VARIETIES

Merlot (11,432 ha, 9%)

A significant chunk of these plantings may still be Carmenere – either in mixed vineyards or due to either wilful or ignorant misidentification. The truth is that Merlot struggles in Chile, suffering from dehydration (hence drying, baked wines) among other ailments. Many theories have been forwarded – including the weakness of its own roots (elsewhere, and increasingly now in Chile, it tends to be planted on rootstock). To my mind, Merlot is simply planted in far too many unsuitably hot sites in Chile. Great Merlot is made in very few, very specific sites in the world. Chile needs to find those sites and, in the meantime, replant the others to different varieties. Authorities should also start to clamp down on producers selling wines as Merlot when in fact they are predominantly Carmenere. The long-term benefits outweigh the short-term implications.

Chardonnay (10,970 ha, 9%)

There was a time when tasting a flight of Chilean Chardonnays felt like ordeal by confectionery. It's taken some new plantings and obsessive work by winemakers (like Marcelo Papa and François Massoc) to change this. And boy have things moved on. Limarí now flies the flag as Chile's Chardonnay homeland but there are fine examples from Aconcagua Costa, Casablanca, San Antonio, the Andean east (Maipo, Cachapoal) and the south (Malleco). Acidity, structure and savoury tones are now hallmarks of the best Chilean Chardonnays. It's also making some very decent fizz. As with Merlot, Chardonnay needs very specific sites and an experienced winemaking hand; Chile is getting there.

Carmenere (10,040 ha, 8%)

'Where is the Carmenere devotion in this country?!' rails Polkura winemaker and MOVI man Sven Bruchfeld. 'We haven't even made the box, so how can we think outside of it yet?!' He has a point. These are early days for Chilean Carmenere – the grape was only officially identified in 1994 – but real progress has felt slow in this time. This has led many to question whether Carmenere is a top-flight grape variety after all. It undoubtedly is – but time, patience and perseverance are required for Carmenere to express its full potential. Results of the first proper clonal research programme are just being released, with intriguing results (for vine geeks) about Carmenere's poor fertility being due to deformed pollen rather than bent stamens. And work by forward-thinking winemakers like Andrea León, Alvaro Espinoza and Mario Geisse is demonstrating Carmenere's potential for elegance and diversity rather than just an 'unripe vs over-ripe' bipolarity. As Bruchfeld implies, Carmenere needs a bit more love.

Syrah (7,393 ha, 6%)

If I had my way, Syrah would exchange places with Cabernet in terms of varietal plantings in Chile. I think Syrah is phenomenally well suited to this country's splintered geography, in its eroded granite slopes and inebriating sunshine. (Others clearly agree

VARI - ETIES

CHILE WINE BRIEF

GRAPE VARIETIES

– from no registered plantings in 1995, by 2011 it covered nearly 7,400 hectares, albeit nowhere near Cab's 40,837.) It can produce wines of startling diversity – from the peppery levity of Elqui to the dense potency of Apalta – as well as outstanding value and quality. The only problem is getting people to buy it: for various reasons there appears to be a commercial block with Syrah. There is hope, though. A study I conducted for my Master of Wine dissertation showed significant appetite for premium Chilean Syrah, both from consumers and the UK trade, once they had tried the stuff. As a British prime minister once said, there are three priorities: education, education and education.



País (7,079 ha, 6%)

What was once a vague embarrassment on Chile's varietal list is experiencing a change in fortune. This is largely due to the work of the Miguel Torres winery which since 2007 has been running a programme focusing on reviving the fortunes of formerly disregarded 'heritage' varieties like Muscat and País (also known as Mission or Criolla). Torres winemaker Fernando Almeda has undertaken detailed work on coaxing quality from what is a thin-skinned, often vastly over-productive variety, making a delightful pink fizz and Beaujolais-esque red wine in the process. 'Chilean wine has developed so fast we've forgotten where we've come from,' says Almeda. 'Now we're rescuing our heritage.' While much of the country's País is still planted in the wrong places, it's heartening to see this bit of Chile's vinous legacy being put to good purpose.

Pinot Noir (3,729 ha, 3%)

The holy grail. As a Burgundian winemaker once said: 'It takes a lifetime to make great Pinot. And then you die.' The quest is afoot in Chile, as winemakers are taking up the challenge in increasing numbers and with ever greater zeal. It's a fascinating process to witness and laudable progress is already being made. I firmly believe that Chile can and will make great Pinot Noir. The first thing that needs to change is the mindset – making great Pinot is a high-wire act that implies great risk, but also great potential

GRAPE VARIETIES

reward. There are other challenges too. Chile's great Pinot terroirs need finding, cultivating and fine tuning: too many sites are still too warm, poorly planted or badly managed. Winemakers need to taste more great Pinot from all around the world – Burgundy yes but New Zealand, Australia, Germany too – and develop a second sense for this most elusive and haunting of varieties. Then it takes time. Great Pinot needs experience and vine age (around half of Chile's vineyard is under 15 years old, and good new Pinot clones are a recent thing in Chile). For now, Chilean Pinot remains excellent value and increasingly diverse in style – with the occasional wine to make the pulse race.

Carignan (782 ha, 0.6%)

The re-discovery of Carignan, and other varieties like it, has been one of the most exciting stories in modern Chilean winemaking. Much of it was planted in the early 20th century under government incentive schemes: it yielded well and gave colour and body to País wines. But as the vines matured and yields decreased, it fell out of favour and was overlooked in Chile's modernising rush in the 1990s which prioritised more international varieties like Cabernet, Merlot and Pinot Noir. When the old, often dry-farmed Carignan vines were slowly rediscovered in the noughties, it was a powerful reminder of the diversity and heritage in Chilean wine. Now, Carignans can be found in a variety of styles, from rich and inky to juicy and fresh. It has even provided the basis for a nascent appellation in the form of VIGNO, a designation used by producers of wines based on (a minimum of 65%) old-vine Carignan from dry-farmed vineyards in the southern coastal hills.

Others

Chile has draconian plant quarantine laws, which have impeded the development of varietal diversity in the country. While this is regrettable, it's been good to see committed growers successfully begin to imbue the country's vineyards with the kind of variety that it can and should have. There is massive potential for all kinds of weird and wonderful wines to be made in this protean nation.

I have tasted delightful wines lately from the likes of Grenache, Malbec, Muscat, Cabernet Franc, Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Mourvedre, Cinsault, Petite Sirah, Marsanne, Nebbiolo, PX, Sauvignon Gris, Petit Verdot, Torontel, Viognier and Tannat. Other varieties are being planted too. Aglianico, Refosco, Tempranillo, Sangiovese, Touriga Nacional, Albariño, Teroldego, Corvina, Greco, Garganega, Vermentino, Barbera, Gamay, Graciano, Marselan, Mencía and Zinfandel are names that crop up in official figures or my research.

Chile needs to experiment – within reason. There's no point planting deliberately obscure varieties just for the bragging rights. But where they can provide some intrigue or original wine styles, and in the process help bolster Chile's viticultural credentials and broader wine portfolio, they are very welcome.

VARIETIES

CHILE WINE BRIEF

REGIONS

A thumbnail guide to Chile's wine regions. There are no maps – mapping a country as lanky and diverse as Chile is a Sisyphean task, well beyond the scope of this publication.

I'd recommend the fold-out map produced annually by Origo Ediciones (Wines of Chile often have copies, or you can find old versions on Amazon). Or consult my book, *The Wines of Chile* (Kindle edition available via Amazon) or *The World Atlas of Wine*.

Elqui (525 hectares)

Star gazers and pisco grape brandy were the staples of this clear-skied, dramatic narrow valley until wine entered stage left in the early noughties. And what an entrance: vivid, peppery Syrah and tangy Sauvignon Blanc were the initial stars but now this tableau is growing. There are promising things happening both in the high-altitude east and near the coast in the west where the valley opens out to La Serena and the ocean.

Star varieties: Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Malbec

Star producers: Falernia, Mayu, Lapostolle, San Pedro, De Martino



REGIONS

Limarí (2,817 hectares)

A strong cooling ocean influence and limestone-encrusted soils help give wines with structure and gravitas in what are effectively the southern fringes of the Atacama Desert. Recent developments in the west (Talinay) and east near Hurtado are further broadening the region's potential for diversity. This is proving to be one of Chile's hot-spots for Chardonnay, making rich but structured wines with a savoury, saline lick.

Star varieties: Chardonnay, Syrah, Pinot Noir

Star producers: Tabalí, Maycas del Limarí, Tamaya, De Martino

Aconcagua (1,207 hectares)

New developments in the coastal west (Aconcagua Costa and around Quillota) have injected much-needed diversity into an otherwise staid regional offering of generous reds. We can expect a lot more diversity and quality wines to emerge from this region in the future.

Star varieties: Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc

Star producers: Errázuriz, Montes, Valdivieso, Seña

Casablanca (6,047 hectares)

A region revived. The arrival of serious small-scale producers and an acceptance that Casablanca is not simply one homogenous 'cool-climate' area has led to massive improvements in the wines. There is still much more to do in terms of replanting, varietal adjustment and discovering new areas (especially in the west) but it's great to see this famous name back on form.

Star varieties: Syrah, Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir, Gewürztraminer

Star producers: Bodegas RE, Montsecano, Casas del Bosque, Morandé

San Antonio (inc Leyda, 2,283 hectares)

Casablanca's successor as Chile's sexiest coastal wine region saw a gold rush of producers keen to join the action. Things are settling down now but it's clear that some of Chile's best wines are being made in these blustery, bright hillsides. As techniques are refined and experiments fine tuned, there will be more to come, too.

Star varieties: Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Sauvignon Gris, Riesling, Pinot Noir

Star producers: Viña Leyda, Casa Marín, Matetic, Undurraga

Maipo (12,679 hectares)

The gravitational centre of Chilean wine orbiting around the capital Santiago, Maipo is neither its biggest nor (to my mind) best region, on current form. Some of the country's finest vineyard sites are unquestionably located here, including fabulous Cabernet

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Sauvignon over alluvial fans in Pirque and Puente Alto. But the wines are all too often over-cooked: too rich, too ripe, too extracted, too alcoholic – too much. Look back three or four decades and the wines are often sensational examples of the beauty of simplicity. Less is more.

Star varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere

Star producers: Undurraga, De Martino, Concha y Toro, Santa Rita, Antiyal, Pérez Cruz, Carmen

Cachapoal (12,606 hectares)

The wallflower of Chilean wine is slowly being coaxed into the limelight by a brave band of producers in the Andean east. Like Maipo, some questionable winemaking has stymied what are some decent vineyard assets. With more ambition and sensitivity, this could easily change.

Star varieties: Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere

Star producers: Calyptra, Aristos, Clos des Fous, Altaïr

Colchagua (28,616 hectares)

One of Chile's most dynamic wine regions over the last decade, Colchagua is finally starting to diversify beyond its staple of big, often brash reds reliant on Cabernet Sauvignon. This is good news because, to my mind, Cabernet is not the grape for most of Colchagua (a heretical notion given its local ubiquity). The development of more coastal areas (Paredones, Pumanque), some detailed viticultural work and a more diverse producer base are shaping a bright future for this rural heartland.

Star varieties: Carmenere, Syrah, Carignan, Grenache, Mourvedre

Star producers: Lapostolle, Montes, Casa Silva, Cono Sur, Villalobos, LFE

Curicó (18,510 hectares)

The dozy neighbour to dynamic Colchagua, Curicó has been the least noteworthy of Chile's regions lately. This may change – there are nooks and crannies of great potential value here – but for now even its best producers tend to do their greatest work outside the region.

Star varieties: Cabernet Sauvignon

Star producers: Miguel Torres, Valdivieso, San Pedro

Maule (31,831 hectares)

Like its southerly neighbours Itata and Bío Bío, Maule is a region rediscovering itself. For long the un-credited engine room of Chilean wine, Maule is finally starting to capitalise on considerable assets including a wealth of dry-farmed, old-vine material – often Carignan – in its rolling western hills. Young winemakers are

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starting to court wizened growers rather than deride them. A common mistake is that winemakers, when faced with such beautiful old vine fruit, try to do too much with it, making impressive but undrinkable wines. This extensive, historic region still has many treasures to yield.

Star varieties: Carignan, País, Malbec, Sauvignon Blanc

Star producers: Gillmore, Erasmo (Reserva de Caliboro), Laberinto (Ribera del Lago), O.Fournier, Terranoble

Itata (6,777 hectares)

The rolling, largely forested countryside around the mighty port of Concepción in south-central Chile's represents Chile's winemaking heritage. It's where some of the country's first vineyards are thought to have been developed in the 1550s. That heritage has been a mixed blessing, though, as winemakers have scorned the local País and Moscatel – until recently. Work by Marcelo Retamal at De Martino and Fernando Almeda at Torres is helping champion these formerly downtrodden varieties, and the small-holders who faithfully tend them. More plantings are going on, especially near the coast. It's a big prediction, but I reckon that in the next decade Itata could be one of Chile's most exciting wine regions.

Star varieties: Moscatel, Cinsault, País

Star producers: De Martino, Miguel Torres, Zaranda, García & Schwaderer



Bío Bío (1,715 hectares)

This is Chile's verdant, violent south. Rolling hills are thick with forest, the mighty Bío Bío river runs swollen and blue over granite, slate and limestone. There is a rebellious, creative, stubborn streak to the local character, similar to that found in Concepción (perhaps fostered by the long Mapuche resistance to centralised power in Santiago). In short, it's the perfect place to make wine. So

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it's something of a mystery as to why more hasn't been achieved here, save a few notable exceptions. The precedent is set; forward-thinking producers need to capitalise.

Star varieties: Riesling, Pinot Noir, País, Chardonnay

Star producers: Cono Sur, Concha y Toro, Dos Andes

Malleco (16 hectares)

Chile's bread basket has proved it can moonlight more than passably as a fine wine region thanks to Felipe de Solminihac's SoldeSol project. It's now gratifying to see others taking up the challenge. Structured, serious Chardonnay and elegant mid-weight Pinot Noir look like being the stars of the show but there is much yet to be done here. What Malleco and the rest of Chile's southerly wine country needs is more winemakers to come and live here rather than commuting from Santiago. Only that way will this land reveal just how great its wines can be.

Star varieties: Chardonnay, Pinot Noir

Star producers: SoldeSol, William Fèvre, Altos las Gredas

Others

The one thing you can always rely on in Chile is novelty. Seemingly every time I visit or talk to someone I hear of a new wine project pushing back the compass point in one or other direction.

On the one hand, this is healthy. Chile is still in the process of self-discovery and, being one of the most naturally diverse wine nations on earth, it will take time for it to work out where best to make each wine style.

On the other, Chile should be wary of innovation for innovation's sake. New projects need commitment – of time, money and patience – to weed out inevitable mistakes and spend time perfecting the promise.

In the north, Ayllu is an eye-opening wine from the heart of the desiccated Atacama Desert (Region II) at 2,350m altitude near Toconao; further plantings in the area are planned. Ventisquero has set aside some hectares for vines in Huasco (Region III), where Sauvignon and Chardonnay look promising.

In the south, Casa Silva has installed vineyards near Lago Ranco (Region X) and a new Pinot Noir is due imminently. Undurraga's fearless Rafael Urrejola used his father's knowledge of cherry tree cultivation to parachute in some Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir vines to what might be one of the southernmost vineyards in the world, at 46°S near the ice fields in Chile Chico (Region XI). The wines are invigorating.

I salute the pioneers taking on the challenge. Chile is an extraordinary country blessed with kaleidoscopic geographical and vinous potential. Future generations of winemakers will be in their debt.

2013 VINTAGE REPORT

‘It was the season of Light, it was
the season of Darkness’

Charles Dickens,
A Tale of Two Cities

It was once said of Chile that, being a viticultural paradise, all vintages were largely homogenous and equally good. The rule no longer holds (if it ever did). There is now significant vintage variation notable in Chilean wines as the country's vineyard spreads into marginal territory at all points of the compass and winemakers are ever more sensitive and experienced when processing their fruit.

The following is an appraisal of the 2013 vintage written in August 2013. Given the harvest ended in May and all the wines tasted are unfinished, these remarks are necessarily anticipatory. However, this report is compiled on the back of extensive conversations with winemakers and tank sample tastings, as well as a digest of official reports. Chile's wines (especially its fine ones) are increasingly marked by vintage variation on a regional basis so it makes sense to have a digestible overview of the latest one here.

‘Curious’ is one of the better summations of the 2013 vintage I’ve heard (thanks Sebastián Warnier of Santa Rita). It certainly seems to be a mixed bag, and not just in terms of results but also regionality. After the torrid heat of 2012, conditions in 2013 were

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more in line with 2010 and 2011 – ie long, coolish seasons – but with one important difference: rain.

Heavy rain events in December followed by humid, coolish conditions had a decisive impact on the vintage. Plant vigour exploded and yields rose (the water having swollen berry sizes: average bunch weights in one Casablanca Sauvignon vineyard moving from 90g to 140g). Fungal disease became a major risk. The phenological process, including ripening, was delayed by up to three weeks and some higher yielding vineyards struggled to ripen at all.

Harvests were uniformly late, albeit in relatively dry, amenable conditions. Successful growers were those who started off the season with low-yielding vines, managed the disease risk well and waited for the right time to harvest. This was a particularly cool year for San Antonio (including Leyda) so expect some vivid wines from this coastal region.

The 2013 wines are marked by bright acidity, relatively low alcohol and well defined fresh fruit. Quality looks to be variable but, in those cases where the vineyards were well managed, there is the potential for some outstanding wine, especially in the whites and early reds like Pinot Noir. Some growers report slightly less concentrated styles than 2010 and 2011, especially in the longer cycle reds like Cabernet and Carmenere, with the latter often struggling to reach fully maturity. Nevertheless, some past vintages have shown that working these varieties to their limits, and precisely not falling into excess, can produce excellent results. Time will tell.

The one significant exception to almost all of the above was the north. Limarí suffered yet another year of drought (recorded rainfall during this season was omm). While aridity is expected in this semi-desert area, apparently some vineyards were simply left to wither this year, which is disturbing news. Other than that, conditions were relatively warm and the harvest was early (in some parts up to three weeks earlier than 2012).

Thumbnail guides to a few previous vintages

2012

Torrid summer heat led to one of the earliest harvests of recent times. Whites (especially Sauvignon Blanc) and early reds suffer from a lack of freshness.

2011

The second La Niña-affected year in a row, like 2010 this was a relatively late season that gave very good results in whites and reds.

2010

Long, dry, relatively cool vintage which gave excellent whites and well defined reds.

2009

Warm year that gave rich, ripe styles of red.

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I think it's important to focus on producers. It allows a different kind of insight into the dynamics of the Chilean wine scene that tasting notes alone can't provide.

That said, this is not an exhaustive overview of Chilean wine producers. It's a personal selection of those wineries which I feel are most worthy of attention and comment, based on extensive tasting, research and often personal visits and meetings with winemakers. Any criticism is constructive in intent. All producers are listed in alphabetical order (including in the top ten rankings).

Similarly, my producer and winemaker rankings are meant to be discussion points rather than definitive classifications. They are based on recent performance and I expect them to change from year to year – though it will be instructive to note which producers and winemakers sustain a presence.

PRODUCER RANKINGS

TOP TEN PRODUCERS

- ★ **Aristos**
- ★ **Bodegas RE**
- ★ **Casa Marín**
- ★ **Concha y Toro**
- ★ **Cono Sur**
- ★ **De Martino**
- ★ **Falernia/Mayu**
- ★ **García & Schwaderer (Bravado)**
- ★ **Viña Leyda**
- ★ **Undurraga**

TEN TO WATCH

- ★ Apaltagua
- ★ Calyptra
- ★ Clos des Fous
- ★ Lapostolle
- ★ Matetic
- ★ Montsecano
- ★ Morandé
- ★ Nativá
- ★ Santa Carolina
- ★ Volcanes de Chile

TEN BEST VALUE

- ★ Concha y Toro
- ★ Cono Sur
- ★ Errázuriz ('icon' wines not withstanding)
- ★ Falernia/Mayu
- ★ Miguel Torres
- ★ Pérez Cruz
- ★ Quintay
- ★ Santa Alicia
- ★ Viña Leyda
- ★ Volcanes de Chile

STAR WINEMAKERS

- ★ Francisco Baettig (Errázuriz)
- ★ Ricardo Baettig (Morandé)
- ★ Giorgio Flessati (Falernia)
- ★ Andrea León (Lapostolle)
- ★ François Massoc (Calyptra)
- ★ Pablo Morandé (RE)
- ★ Viviana Navarrete (Viña Leyda)
- ★ Marcelo Retamal (De Martino)
- ★ Rodrigo Soto (Veramonte)
- ★ Rafael Urrejola (Undurraga)

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Aquitania & SoldeSol

(Maipo & Malleco)

I have great respect for Felipe de Solminihac, one of Chile's most modest yet quietly influential winemakers. To my mind, his most interesting wines are not those he makes under the Aquitania banner in Maipo (although the Lazuli Cabernet does age gracefully). That distinction goes to the SoldeSol wines he makes on the in-laws' land in Traiguén – structured, restrained Chardonnay and sappy Pinot Noir.

Aristos (Cachapoal)

A gold-plated joint venture between Vosne-Romanée producer Louis-Michel Liger-Belair and two former primary school colleagues from Concepción who have gone onto great things: gifted winemaker François Massoc and highly regarded terroir consultant Pedro Parra. The ambition and skill behind this project was announced in some style with the sensational Duquesa d'A Chardonnay 2008. The Cabernet has never quite reached the same heights – it's a bit too rich for my liking. The fruit for Aristos has hitherto mainly been sourced from Alto Cachapoal (see Calyptra) but the idea is to diversify in future, perhaps using Pinot from recently planted vineyards in Penco, near Concepción, and Chardonnay from Traiguén. Prices are fiercely high. A lot is expected of Aristos in the future.

Ayllu (Atacama)

It may be a whim, but I wanted to include this name because I think it's important. There is precedent for winemaking in the heart of the Atacama Desert and now it is being revived. At nearly 2,500m altitude, in one of the driest places on earth, tiny quantities of this earthy, gritty, homespun red are made from 400 hitherto unidentified vines in Toconao. The plantation was part of a social aid project by miners Soquimich and INDAP; Professor Alvaro Peña was drafted in, as was terroir consultant Pedro Parra. Although Parra jokingly dubs this 'ground zero winemaking', both see potential here and have gently helped improve basic hygiene and wine growing practices. More growers are now coming on board and there are plans to plant at up to 3,500 metres in Talabre, where limestone soils abound and the air is even more parched and breathless.

Bodegas RE – see RE

Bravado – see García & Schwaderer

Calyptra (Cachapoal)

There are two keys to understanding Calyptra. The first is the high-altitude vineyards in Cachapoal, which produce naturally fresh, characterful wines. The second is inspired winemaker François Massoc, one of Chile's true talents – intuitive, impassioned and imaginative. The site is also used as a source for Aristos and Clos des Fous wines (Massoc works closely with Burgundian

vintner Louis-Michel Liger-Belair and terroir consultant Pedro Parra). The Aristos Chardonnay and Calyptra Sauvignon Blanc are bravura examples of what this site and winemaker are capable of; the reds to date have been less persuasive.

Carmen (Maipo)

Winemaker and inveterate surfer Sebastian Labbé may look like an action-hero but he displays a notable sensitivity in his winemaking. Carmen's wines have improved immensely as a result of his influence – his experience includes winemaking in New Zealand and he wants to define the Carmen style as fresh, drinkable wine styles from cool-climate areas. 'The south will be key for the future of Chile,' he boldly declares as we taste some excellent, invigorating Malbec and Carignan from Maule. Labbe is a young but experienced head prepared to take risks and innovate. This bodes well for Carmen.

Casa Marín (San Antonio)

One of Chile's few consistently outstanding producers. Just like her wines, owner Mariluz Marín polarises people. But sometimes you need a bit of uncompromising, indomitable spirit in wine. Mariluz has now been joined by her son Felipe, who as well as helping out with the classic wines has developed a new line Viñedos Lo Abarca, focusing on Sauvignon and Pinot initially (with Syrah to be added). Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Sauvignon Gris, Gewürztraminer and Syrah are regularly brilliant here

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– all vivid, structured wines marked by the refreshing presence of the icy Pacific just four kilometres away. Pinot Noir has, to my mind, been the one weak spot in the portfolio – often simply too oaky, chabby and beefy when it needs elegance and restraint. The new Tierras Blancas vineyard, over limestone soils, may provide some different raw material to work with. This particular success story is still in the telling.

Casa Silva (Colchagua)

A combination of determined commercial nous and savvy, ambitious winemaking characterises Casa Silva. Some years back, the wines were pretty soulless. But then began an intriguing process of renovation and change, perhaps typified best by the three-year Micro Terroir study in conjunction with the University of Talca researching sites across Colchagua. The main result, in addition to a few useful headlines, has been a transformation in the quality of Carmenere, especially from the Los Lingues site in eastern Colchagua, which now regularly produces some of this country's best Carmenere: expressive, rounded and complex yet fresh and lifted. The development and promotion of cool sites in western Colchagua is also a credit to Casa Silva (the Cool Coast Sauvignon Blanc is zingy and attractive; the new Pinot is a work in progress). Now there is a new fizz (Fervor) and plans for a new Pinot Noir from the family stud farm in Futrono, Lago Ranco (around 900 kms south of Santiago).

Casas del Bosque

(Casablanca)

Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah and sweet Riesling are the stand-outs here – consistently rewarding wines made in the cool, blustery hills of western Casablanca by live-wire Kiwi winemaker Grant Phelps.



Clos des Fous (Cachapoal)

As the name suggests, experimentation is the order of the day here. But happily these are wines that aim decidedly for under- rather than over-statement. Pared-back elegance is the aim, from unoaked Chardonnay to earthy Cab and juicy blends such as the Caquenina (featuring Malbec, Carignan, País, Carmenere, Syrah and 'Portugais Bleu') from the south. The formulae still need perfecting – the wines aren't quite there yet, though the Chardonnay is already impressive. Nonetheless, this is a producer growing in repute. Keep an eye on its on-going work with Pinot from sites as diverse as Aconcagua Costa, Malleco and Bío Bío. It is also starting to make some hugely promising Malbec from old, dry-farmed vines in Bío Bío near Concepción.

Concha y Toro (Maipo)

The leviathan of Chilean wine and, for many years now, its most reliable and high-profile ambassador. Although I know many (often smaller scale) winemakers disagree, I firmly believe that Chile is lucky to have Concha. It's not easy selling 13.6 million cases of consistently decent wine every year round the world (the wider group sells over 30 million), and growing value at an annual average of 18%, but they do. They've also more or less managed to keep up with the frantic pace of innovation around them: always a challenge for a big producer in a wine scene as dynamic as Chile's. My one criticism is that Concha has tremendous assets and could use them better. It has hugely talented, loyal winemakers who need more liberty to experiment, innovate and express themselves freely on an international stage. It has top-notch vineyards (eg in Pirque and Puente Alto) which cry out to be made into elegant, eloquent wine but which too often are made into safe, international, glossy, rich reds. In short, a bit more freedom for the various Major Toms from Ground Control could see Concha being even more successful in the long-term.

Cono Sur (Colchagua)

It hardly seems like 20 years since Cono Sur was first founded as an offshoot of Concha y Toro with a brief to be eclectic and dynamic. But 2013 marks the 20th anniversary of what has matured into one of Chile's most reliable and best value producers. Genial winemaker Adolfo Hurtado has placed

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an unashamed (and laudable) emphasis on Pinot Noir – so much so that the winery crushed 4.5 million kilograms of Pinot in 2013, nearly as much as its 5 million kg of Cabernet. In a nation as Cab-dominant as Chile, this is quite something – indeed, Cono Sur may be one of the world's biggest growers of Pinot with its 400 ha of plantings. Hurtado also makes excellent Riesling, Gewürztraminer, Sauvignon Blanc and Syrah. Being hyper critical, the wines can sometimes be a bit safe when, for example, Pinot really needs thrill and sex appeal to be great. Nothing that a bit of fine-tuning in the vineyard and greater liberty for the winemakers can't resolve.

De Martino (Maipo)

Marcelo Retamal is one of Chile's most thoughtful, informed and insightful winemakers. De Martino – and Chile – are lucky to have him. Retamal saved De Martino from a future of bland, ripe Central Valley wines by implementing an audacious plan in 2011 to eschew standardisation and prioritise Chile's terroir and viticultural legacy by harvesting earlier, abandoning new oak barrels, cultured yeasts and enzymes, and embracing tinaja clay pots. Of course, such actions count for little if you don't know the terroirs in question and have a very precise and detailed viticultural programme. This is why Retamal has been working closely with plant physiologist Dr Claudio Pastene, and drives thousands of kilometres round Chile's highways every year. (He's

also a well fed winemaker: insisting on joining growers for barbecues to keep the 'personal connection'.) Projects range from breathless high-altitude vineyards in upper Elqui to blustery hillsides in Itata, which produce the celebrated 'natural' Viejas Tinajas wines. All of this has transformed De Martino into one of Chile's most rewarding producers. Retamal may not come across as a natural risk-taker but you under-estimate his passion at your peril. An inveterate rocker (the ripped jeans and long hair have long gone, though), he is a die-hard Iron Maiden fan and his favourite quote of theirs is: 'If you're gonna die, die with your boots on.'



Tasting with Marcelo Retamal

Errázuriz (Aconcagua)

'Chile needs identity,' muses winemaker Francisco Baettig, 'but everything has to start from the wine.' We are talking big picture stuff over sweetbreads and Pinot. Baettig is a notorious Francophile (his wife is French and he has a cellar there) and is refreshingly

unashamed to say he prefers Old World to New World wines. Recently, he's been working with Vosne-Romanée producer Louis-Michel Liger-Belair, which has 'put us on the right track', says Baettig. Increasingly (and laudably) his wines are starting to reflect this, from textured, mineral Sauvignon Blanc to haunting Pinot, peppery Syrah and deftly rendered Mediterranean-style blends, both red and white. Although this programme has begun with Wild Ferment, Aconcagua Costa and The Blend brands, I'd love to see the 'less is more' philosophy rolled out encompass Errázuriz icons including Don Max, Señal and Viñedo Chadwick. For now, progress remains steady and encouraging.

Falernia/Mayu (Elqui)

This over-achieving northern outpost continues to excite. Its vivid, scented and spicy Syrah has become a Chilean classic (it makes many labels – all are worth trying, though to my mind the Syrah from the more coastal Titón vineyard is the best). Tangy, pungent Sauvignon Blanc is also a house staple. But it's good to see winemaker Giorgio Flessati refusing to rest on his laurels (this impassioned, hugely talented man is incapable of stasis in any case). Recently I've tasted new Torontel, Riesling, PX, Pinot Noir and Malbec. The latter is probably the best so far but, while the others are works in progress, they all show good potential. Most importantly, they're all refreshingly different from the Chilean norm.

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García & Schwaderer

(Casablanca)

Take two very talented winemakers (young enough – but experienced enough), marry them for constant creative tension, stir in a bit of Burgundian sojourning – and you have a very potent mix. Felipe García and Constanza Schwaderer are on form right now and have the talent and skills to become one of Chile's headlining acts. Felipe coaxes brilliance out of Sauvignon Blanc while Connie makes very elegant Pinot ('I don't expect big scores,' she says, 'I just want to make a wine I like to drink: fresh, with character'). Both are friends with Burgundian producer Benjamin Leroux – they visit every year for harvest and make a decent Vougeot too. New reds from the south (Itata, Cauquenes) also look very promising. Comments Connie: 'With all our wines, we're thinking: how will they work on the dinner table?' Although there is ongoing marital debate about the brand name moving forwards (Bravado? García y Schwaderer?), this is a key producer to watch.

Koyle (Colchagua)

Biodynamic producer based in Colchagua's eastern reaches, formed after the Undurraga family were ousted from their eponymous winery by the Colombian Picciotto clan. Reds are impressive and characterful but can sometimes be overdone. The new Paredones Sauvignon Blanc is a welcome diversification for the portfolio, the 2011 better than the 2012.

Laberinto – Ribera del

Lago (Maule)

Tousle-haired winemaker Rafael Tirado started this private venture in 1993 with his father-in-law, who had a holiday home overlooking the Colbún reservoir in eastern Maule. 'We wanted to make decent wine,' comments Tirado, 'but with total liberty to experiment and get it wrong.' Such free-thinking spirit even led them to plant a vineyard in the shape of a labyrinth (hence the name) – partly for the different exposures but also as a playful form of natural art and to challenge the order imposed on the vine, which Tirado views as a naturally chaotic plant. (Tirado also notes that he's had some of the most important chats with his kids amid this vinous labyrinth.) The fresh conditions and volcanic soils give fresh, structured wines – the standout so far has been the intense, inscrutable, age-worthy Sauvignon Blanc.

Lapostolle (Colchagua)

Edith Piaf's famous 'Je ne regrette rien' was playing tellingly as I chatted and tasted with Andrea León, the rising star of the Lapostolle (and Chilean) wine firmament. I'd just tasted her 2013 wines from barrel – stunning Apalta Mourvedre and Petit Verdot, Elqui Grenache and Maule Carignan – and we were working through her inspired Collection wines, a series of Syrahs and Carmenères which showcase the terroir diversity of Chile. The accent was on freshness and unadorned, honest wine that talked of its variety and vineyard location.

The 2011s were a step up from the already impressive debut 2010s – and the 2013s even more exciting. This from a winery that has made its name on the back of ripe, safe, powerful wine styles crafted under the influence of globe-trotting consultant Michel Rolland. Welcome change is clearly afoot, a fact reinforced by the entrance this summer of new general manager Charles de Bournet, son of owner Alexandre Marnier Lapostolle. Lapostolle has excellent resources, including 370 hectares of organic and biodynamic vineyard. It now needs to invest in its future and trust its younger generation.



With Andrea León of Lapostolle

Louis-Antoine Luyt

(Maule)

Something of a restless searcher, Luyt came to Chile from his native France in the late 1990s and swiftly progressed from dish-washing to wine production. Inspired by the work of Jacques Lardière and Marcel Lapiere in France, and decrying the 'homogenous' styles of Chilean wine at the time, Luyt headed south to make wines with a difference. It's

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a task he's still engaged in – delighting and dismaying in equal measure – but always with the accent on natural viticulture and minimal intervention. While quality can be variable, these are wines with an uncompromising and indomitable spirit (like the man himself) and, as such, are valuable contributions to the Chilean wine scene.

Luis Felipe Edwards

(Colchagua)

There is a ruthless commercial focus at LFE that doesn't always sit easily with the fine wine aspirations. Nonetheless, ambitious plans are afoot. New Zealander Matt Thomson has just been hired to consult on whites and Pinot (LFE is doing promising things in Leyda on this front). In 2012 the winery bought 700 hectares in Pumanque, coastal Colchagua, and also planted 400 hectares in Maule the year before. Hillside plantations at the winery's Colchagua base continue and now include Grenache, Malbec and Tempranillo. The wines often speak of great raw materials somewhat smothered by over-ambition and heavy-handedness. There is gold here; it just needs refining.



Matetic (San Antonio)

After a period off the boil, Matetic looks set to return to form. In 2012 the winery re-formed its original 'A-team' that made such stunning wines, especially Syrah, in the early vintages from 2001. Winemaker Julio Bastías has a wealth of consulting expertise to call on, from Rodrigo Soto to Alan York and Pedro Parra. The winery has developed promising new vineyard sites in Valle Hermoso (closer to the coast in Casablanca) for whites and Pinot and Santo Tomás for Syrah. Organic and biodynamic certification is slowly being put in place. Matetic is a producer abuzz with ideas and potential.

Maycas del Limarí

(Limarí)

It's great to see Concha y Toro's northern division continuing to consolidate. But I still feel they could take more risks and provide a bit more thrill factor. Chardonnay continues to be the strong suit here, most notably in the intense, rich yet structured and savoury Quebrada Seca and Reserva Especial wines. The Pinots, while promising, need more work: they often have enticing aromatics but then lack cohesion, grace and core focus. A new traditional method Chardonnay/Pinot fizz is in development too.

Mayu – see Falernia

Miguel Torres Chile

(Curicó)

Torres Chile has a pretty catholic portfolio – some things work, others don't

– but lately the hit rate has been better. What's more, real interest has been injected into the portfolio by the company's project reviving Chile's heritage grape varieties. This includes the much derided País (Mission) variety, previously sidelined for local plonk but now championed by Torres very successfully in both pink fizz (Estelado) and juicy, vibrant red (Reserva de Pueblo) formats. The new Days of Summer Muscat from Itata is also a triumph: exotic and invigorating. News from winemaker Fernando Almeda is that learning to coax quality out of such varieties has led to a wholesale change in the way the more classic vineyards are managed, in the search for balance and complexity. This is very good news. Also heartening is the news we may soon be seeing the first proper wine from the ambitious Empedrado vineyard on steep slate soils in coastal Maule, announced to much fanfare but which has since been beset by problems (bird attacks, wrong varieties). By way of criticism, I wish Torres would champion its Chilean identity and credentials more (the labels tend to be very wordy, bland and international), especially the areas from which the wines are sourced.

Montes (Colchagua)

To my mind, Montes has gone too far in staking its reputation on the basis of predictably corpulent, generous reds like Purple Angel, Folly and M. Such wines are fine to a certain extent – albeit not to my taste – but the risk is it stymies innovation and development elsewhere. It's

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good to see some renovation afoot, though – Cabernet Sauvignon used to account for 60% of Montes' Apalta plantings, now that's down to 30% – a welcome development because Apalta suits more Mediterranean varieties. The Outer Limits range is showing a bit of innovative spark, and on my recent visit I tasted some interesting samples of nippy Zapallar Pinot, dry-farmed Marchihue Syrah and juicy Itata Cinsault. Such innovations, together with the winery's focus on reducing alcohol levels, should be fast-tracked.

Montsecano (Casablanca)

This small, biodynamic Pinot producer in coastal Casablanca has a bright future. Alsace producer André Ostertag aims to make 'clear, pure' wines (his Muenchberg Riesling is a bravura case in point). But this hasn't always been the case with this, his Chilean venture with Chilean partners including local grower Julio Donoso. The 2011 wines were pretty wild, rustic to the point of going feral – too much, to my mind – so from 2012 André and Julio are working harder and cleaner to ensure this isn't the case again (though they're still not filtering and fining). 'When you work naturally, there's always a risk,' comments Ostertag. 'I don't want wines that are boring; boring wines are dead wines.' The 2012s are looking very good – vibrant and with a characteristic florality and earthy, savoury tannin that is so appealing – albeit a bit hot on the finish, which was perhaps the result of a warm vintage. Expect better things to come.

Morandé (Cachapoal)

Another producer undergoing an exciting renaissance. Owned by financial group Empresas Juan Yarur, rather than the eponymous winemaker (who still consults), Morandé is now in the very capable hands of Ricardo Baettig, who made wine in Italy for eight years. He has been given liberty to push boundaries and is doing so to very good effect – making provocative and rewarding wines, especially in the Edición Limitada range. Acacia fudres, concrete eggs, Chardonnay on skins – it all happens here, and Baettig has a taste for refreshing, food-friendly wines from his Italian experience. In the pipeline is an old-vine Malbec from Pencahue that's looking very special – the same fruit is also being used in a new joint venture with Argentine winemaker Matías Michelini.

Nativa (Maipo)

Young winemaker Felipe Ramírez is doing exciting things at Nativa, paring the wines back to focus on freshness and imbuing them with a vivacity and focus they had previously lacked. His Cabernet and Carmenere is particularly successful and he's even making a 'nouveau' style of Syrah, principally for the Japanese market, picked early and with no MLF. It's audacious and inspired, if not particularly successful in my view (Cinsault or País might have been a better choice of grape variety). But great to see new ideas and exciting life breathed back into this producer's wines.

Neyen – see Veramonte

Odfjell (Maipo)

Red wine specialist based in Maipo whose most exciting work is happening in the south with the likes of Carignan, Malbec and Tannat. The wines rarely lack for character but could often do with more elegance, freshness and restraint.

Pérez Cruz (Maipo)

Commendable and reliable red-wine specialist. Under the considered eye of winemaker Germán Lyon, the wines have been evolving very nicely. Over three quarters of production is Cabernet Sauvignon, with other bits including Carmenere, Cot (Malbec) and Petit Verdot. The wines reflect their Alto Maipo terroir but are increasingly balanced and fresh.

Quintay (Casablanca)

Worthwhile Casablanca producer making some very decent Sauvignon, Pinot and Syrah.

Ribera del Lago – see Laberinto

Bodegas RE (Casablanca)

A revelation. RE has exploded onto the Chilean wine scene; things will never be the same again. The wines are fiercely eclectic: white, floraged Pinot Noir and Syrah co-fermented with Pinot are two examples. The winery is like a subterranean coven, bristling with gigantic concrete eggs and buried clay tinaja pots. Overseeing this inspired venture is Pablo Morandé, a Chilean wine industry titan

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who was the first to develop Casablanca for viticulture in the 1980s and is now enjoying a new lease of life as a genial, booming-voiced agitator for innovation in Chilean wine. 'Chile has tremendous possibilities to reveal fascinating, unique wines, very far from the regular supermarket commodities,' he enthuses. Day-to-day winemaker is his son, also Pablo Morandé, who looks after the balsamic vinegar, fruit liqueurs and blanc de noirs fizz in addition to the growing and impressive wine portfolio. RE is like Mr Hyde to Chile's Dr Jekyll: it's wild and libertarian. Some may find it scary. In reality, it's hugely entertaining. And delicious.



Pablo Morandé of Bodegas RE

Santa Carolina (Maipo)

A somewhat pedestrian portfolio has been enlightened by an R&D programme focusing on pre-phyllloxera clones which aims to revive traditional styles of Chilean red. I tasted a quite stunning 1967 Estrella de Oro Cabernet from Macul vineyards (sadly long since concreted over under Santiago's urban sprawl) with head winemaker Andres Caballero and the team. It

was inspiration provided by wines like these that led Santa Carolina to embark on this programme with input from Californian ampelographer Andy Walker focusing on heritage vine stock, harvested early and made with minimal intervention. The result is the Luis Pereira wine; I tried a sample of the 2012 vintage, which was quite beautiful in its refreshing, juicy, leafy honesty and elegant persistence. 'I had to break through so many barriers to make this wine,' sighed Caballero, 'but we are doing some really interesting things.' It's to be hoped that such encouraging innovation is allowed to inform the broader winemaking approach.

Santa Rita (Maipo)

Santa Rita is far from being Chile's most dynamic producer but there are encouraging signs at this Maipo stalwart. Australian consultant Brian Croser has re-energised the team, encouraging freshness and minimal intervention since he joined in 2009 (tellingly, this is his only consultancy). While the wider portfolio is decent but fairly steady – Casa Real and Medalla Real Cabs stand out – the new vineyards in Pumanque, coastal Colchagua, are starting to produce some very promising Cabernet Franc and Syrah. What's more, a new range is soon to emerge focusing on 'balance, fruit, terroir and freshness – a change of mentality inspired by Brian,' according to winemaker Andrés Ilabaca. A sneak preview of this new range revealed some very promising, and notably lively, gastronomic Leyda Sauvignon Blanc and

Pinot Noir, Limarí Chardonnay and Apalta Carmenère.

Seña – see Errázuriz

SoldeSol – see Aquitania

Tabalí (Limarí)

Tabalí has exciting projects happening right across Limarí. In the far east, it has just harvested the first fruit from its high-altitude Río Hurtado vineyards – I tasted some impressively crunchy Malbec and vivid Carmenere (albeit in nascent stages). In the coastal west it has the chalky Talinay vineyard, where Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Syrah are showing good potential. Despite the obvious talents of winemaker Felipe Müller and viticulturist Hector Rojas, however, I must confess to being a little frustrated not to have seen more knockout wines, especially from Talinay, given the initial promise. Some of the wines, although fresh and characterful, have seemed to err on the side of caution and soft edges where some swashbuckling, rapier-like character is called for. Perhaps I'm just being impatient. Things haven't been helped by the recent, untimely death of owner Guillermo Luksic; I wish his son Nicolás the best.

Tamaya (Limarí)

A producer that shows glimpses of brilliance but remains somewhat inconsistent, which is frustrating. The new 'T' line shows the ambition here but needs more fine-tuning (and a 'less is more' mentality) to come into its own. To my mind, Tamaya's best bet is to

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major on freshness and food-friendliness. If this happens then the likes of Carmenere, Syrah, Chardonnay and Malbec will have a bright future here.

Tara – see Ventisquero

Terranoble (Maule)

Some quiet yet industrious work has been taking place at this Maule outpost, to excellent effect. Ignacio Concha is one of Chile's lesser seen winemakers but he talks eminent sense and has a deft touch with reds from big-boned Colchagua reds to elegant Casablanca Pinot.

Tunquén (Casablanca)

Relatively new venture by two married Brazilian winemakers making small-production reds and Sauvignon Blanc in Casablanca. From initial tastings, the wines seem to have laudable aims (individuality, freshness) but don't quite deliver. A work in progress.

Undurraga (Maipo)

Exciting times at one of Chile's most venerable producers. In 2013, Rafael Urrejola – one of Chile's very best, most sensitive winemakers – was appointed head of winemaking. This is great news not just for Undurraga but also Chile. Back in 2006, I singled out Undurraga for harsh criticism, labelling the wines, 'bland and formulaic' and recommending sweeping change. Urrejola came on board in 2008, starting with two wines in the new T.H. ('terroir hunter') range. The wines, and Urrejola, went down so well that there are

now 13 wines in the T.H. range (one of the best in Chile now), the winery has eight estates rather than the four of 2008, and Urrejola is now in charge of steering this 15-million-litre titan into the future. It's looking bright. Urrejola is a firm adherent to the 'less is more' philosophy, preferring to use concrete eggs or large vats over oak barrels, and also an inspired innovator. His latest project is to plant Pinot and Sauvignon in Chile Chico, over 2,000 kms south of Santiago, at 46° one of the most southerly vineyards in the world. Initial results are promising, even if it's a labour of love making wine in this wind-whipped, isolated outpost. Undurraga's new sub-brand Volcanes de Chile, under the control of talented winemaker Pilar Díaz, is also looking very promising.

Ventisquero (Colchagua)

A large-scale winery with a talented winemaking team under Felipe Tosso. The wines have tended to be a bit too safe, ripe and predictable for my taste in recent years, but there are signs of change. Detailed vineyard work is leading to wines with more finesse (though this emphasis could be taken further, especially in Apalta) and Casablanca Pinot is also showing good potential. The Tara project in uncharted territory in Huasco, north of Elqui, also provides much needed levity and esoteric interest to the portfolio: tangy Sauvignon Blanc and complex, edgy Chardonnay have been the best of this tiny-production venture so far.

Veramonte (Casablanca)

The arrival in 2012 of the brilliant Rodrigo Soto from Benziger in California (and Matetic, prior to that) was a fillip for Veramonte. But there is much to be done. Initial signs are that Soto is working hard to inject some life and vibrancy to the Sauvignons and Pinots, at the same time as instigating sustainable vineyard practices and more focused viticulture (he's brought Alan York and Pedro Parra in to consult too). For Veramonte to make real progress, it needs to give Soto free rein to revive this once mighty brand. New, more coastal sites might need to be acquired. It should leave Colchagua to its new sister winery Neyen and aim to craft elegant reds from its stunning eastern Casablanca site.



Enrique Villalobos

Villalobos (Colchagua)

What a story. Sculptor Enrique Villalobos makes arresting, massive works for South America's public spaces but had little interest in the vines growing wild around his house and studio in rural Ranguili, near Lolol in coastal Colchagua. Then along came

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a young French winemaker, Matthieu Rousseau, who encouraged Enrique's sons, Rolando and Martín, to make some wine. Though Rousseau sadly died in a traffic accident shortly after the first wine was made, the new release caused great commotion and excitement in Chilean wine circles. The five hectares of vines are thought to have been planted under government incentive schemes in the 1940s and 50s, 'are Carignan as far as anyone can ascertain', says Enrique, and grow wild up rosehip, culenes, pines, boldos, maitenes and blackberry bushes, as they have done, forgotten, for half a century. There is no pruning, except by the horses. 'It's chaos,' comments Enrique, 'but we want minimal human intervention – we want to prove we can work with the earth, let it give what it gives, and make it profitable. We're conservationists.' The wine is as refreshing as the intentions: unadorned, fresh-fruited with wild herb notes: elegant country wine. For now, Rolando and Martín still hold down their day jobs and joke that they keep their father as their 'slave in the countryside.' They all seem pretty happy.

Volcanes de Chile – see **Undurraga**

Viu Manent (Colchagua)

The staple of this historic Colchagua winery has been beefy, inky reds. It still is, to a certain extent – though winemaker Patricio Celedón is slowly shifting the emphasis towards freshness and balance, which is very welcome.

Malbec, Syrah, Grenache and Mourvedre look like they will prove to be the stars here.

Viña Leyda (San Antonio)

One of Chile's standout producers, not just for the quality of its wines but also its consistency and value for money. Viña Leyda put its eponymous wine district on the map (together with the broader San Antonio appellation, of which Leyda is a part). Its founders were the first to bring water to the area, via an eight-kilometre pipeline from the Maipo River – an investment that has since paid handsome dividends. The company now forms part of the broader San Pedro Tarapacá group but talented winemaker Viviana Navarrete seems to enjoy relative autonomy, crafting punchy Sauvignon Blanc, elegant Sauvignon Gris, stylish Pinot Noir, sensational Syrah as well as doing good work with the likes of Riesling, Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer and other grapes. There's even a new fizz. Recent plantings promise better things to come, too.

William Fèvre (Maipo)

After years of slightly predictable winemaking, WF Chile is coming back to life. This was partly the result of work by winemaker Felipe Uribe – so it was disappointing to see him leave recently – and consultant Pedro Parra. The aim has been to promote freshness in the wines by developing vineyards at ever greater altitudes in Alto Maipo. The winery is based in Pirque and has been planting vines (mainly Cabernet and Chardonnay) in

the Cajón del Maipo at up to 1,000m altitude. Results are promising (especially with the Chardonnay) but it's still early days. Further interest comes courtesy of another project in Malleco, on land belonging to the winery's owners the Pino family, featuring promising Pinot Noir – and altogether less convincing Sauvignon Blanc (Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Chardonnay are also planted). One to watch.

Zaranda (Itata)

Not a producer you're likely to see much outside of Chile (just yet), this is nonetheless a name worth noting. A revived family vineyard in Guarilhue, coastal Itata, the vines are old and dry-farmed Muscat, Cinsault and País. These are honest country wines – vins de soif, with zesty, tangy, earthy flavours – made with assistance from winemaker François Massoc

CHILE WINE BRIEF

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I've tasted over a thousand Chilean wines in the last few months. The 130-odd that follow constitute the headline acts.

That doesn't mean they're all fancy wines. Quite the opposite in some cases. It would be boring to champion the accepted classics and, in any case, these often aren't the wines that appeal to me. I've grown tired of glossy, high-octane wines that tick boxes but leave me cold. I want a wine to excite me, to refresh and intrigue me, wines that have me reaching for a plate of food rather than a defibrillator. Good value wines are also important to champion (I take price into account when judging: there's even the odd supermarket own-label in here). In short, these are wines that are rewarding, appetizing and have something to say for themselves.

The tastings were conducted in Chile and the UK, either during meetings with winemakers or at tastings. The latter took place both at my house (with the much valued input of my wife and fellow Master of Wine, Susie) and in more rigorous blind tasting scenarios (eg Decanter panel tastings and World Wine Awards). Often I have tasted the same wine both blind and sighted – ultimately, I find that doing both and cross-referencing is the best way to evaluate wine.

I'd like to thank Wines of Chile, Decanter, Susie and the wineries for making these tastings possible

A word on scoring

Scoring wines is like a risqué joke: it needs to be taken with a pinch of salt.



These scores aren't definitive pronouncements on a wine's quality. Such a notion is absurd. Wine (especially good wine) is a living entity that changes over time, just as tasters do. There is no such thing as total objectivity when it comes to wine. That's why numbers, which give that impression, are ill-suited to the job.

That said, some sort of easy-reference quality scale makes things easy to read and understand. This is why I've used a 5-star scale, with an extra 'standout' division within the 4-star category, which would otherwise be over-populated. The '4-star standout' category thus represents the cream of the 4-star crop.

The wines are listed in rough order of (descending) preference within each category. For number-lovers, I also give a rough equivalent for each category on a 10-point scale, which is how I score when I taste. This doesn't translate easily into the popular 100-point scale, I'm afraid. If it helps, anything over 7/10 is a pretty special wine as far as I'm concerned. For the sake of (relative) conciseness, I've only included wines of 3-stars and above.



My personal preferences

It doesn't matter if you're a Master of Wine or not – we all have personal taste preferences. This is a matter of simple physiology and psychology. I always try to taste with an open-mind, aware of my own preferences but sympathetic to others' too (this process is helped by the fact I usually taste with Susie, so inevitably discussions ensue).

However, I also think it helps to give context for this brief. My preference is for balance above all things. Wine's first duty is to be a refreshing and revitalising drink. An ability to pair with food is a key hallmark of a fine wine for me. Wines which are impressive but undrinkable (ie too alcoholic, too rich) do not light my fire. I want intrigue, honesty, refreshment value and complexity. Great wine, like any great art, provokes an emotional as well as cerebral response. I yearn for that buzz.

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★★★★★

5 STAR Sensational wines (8.5-10/10)

Aristos Duquesa d'A Chardonnay 2008,

Cachapoal, 14.5% - a new dimension for Chilean Chardonnay. Baroque, decadent, sumptuous, savoury - it blew a decent Montrachet out of the water at a recent dinner. Cascading flavours of toasted nuts, baked red apples, buttered toast and fresh morels are harnessed into a precise, invigorating and uplifting finale.

RE Velado 2009,

Casablanca, 14% - a wine that delights and bewilders in equal measure. Serendipity marks it: Pablo Morandé Sr relates how some barrels of Pinot Noir were lost after the 2010 earthquake. When rediscovered, they had a film of yeast growing on them; Morandé decided to blend them and make this esoteric but virtuoso wine that tastes like a cross between Fino sherry and flat (but wonderfully invigorating) vintage champagne. Structured, complex, replete, shocking, delicious.

Casa Marín Miramar Riesling 2010, San

Antonio, 12.5% - tasted blind, I had this as a top Wachau Riesling. Steely, slatey, smoky aromas combine with lime and green apple. The bracing palate profile has

wonderfully vibrant acidity superbly balanced by juicy fruit succulence. Harmonious, young, ravishing. This will develop well in bottle too.

Matetic EQ Syrah 2007,

San Antonio, 14% - the best vintage of this benchmark wine – so far. Matetic is re-forming its 'A-team' so expect great things to come but for now this is its high-tide mark: a dense and brooding yet super focused, fine and sexy Syrah. Packed full of peppery, savoury, dark fruit flavour with a svelte, resonant finish. An emotional experience.

Santa Carolina Estrella de Oro Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 1967, Macul,

13.2% - stunning. Confounds the theory that lighter-bodied Chilean wines can't age. Haunting tobacco, malty, dried herb aromas. The colour is amazingly young and the wine is still vibrant and full of life and character. Such a shame this Macul vineyard has disappeared under Santiago's concrete sprawl.

Cousiño Macul Antiguas Reservas Cabernet Sauvignon 1998, Maipo,

12.5% - elegant bouquet of tobacco, warm gravel and dried dark fruit. On the palate, refined in texture and resonant in flavour, brilliant with ribeye steak. An instructive, historic wine.

Errázuriz Wild Ferment Pinot Noir 2012,

Aconcagua Costa, 13.5% - really quite pale for Chile, with a lovely sappy floral

fresh summer berry fruit nose. Grown up. Beautiful piercing acidity, sappy and direct. Thirst-quenching and moreish – this represents a new dimension in Chilean Pinot. It falls away a tiny bit on the finish – perhaps a vintage thing – but it's a heart-thumping wine.

Undurraga T.H. Cabernet Sauvignon

2011, Pirque, 14% - beautiful focus, purity and elegance: this wine is becoming one of Chile's finest Cabs, the result of much hard work in the vineyard by the Undurraga team. Shows restrained dark berry fruit and mint notes and lovely silky yet firm texture.

Calyptra Gran Reserva Single Vineyard

Sauvignon Blanc 2010, Cachapoal, 13.5% - complex and intense, with a richly textured yet invigorating flavour profile. There are a few smart oaked Sauvignons in Chile but to my mind this wine leads the charge. It has a whiff of Bordeaux's grapefruit, tangerine rind and mineral character but it's pretty full throttle stuff, with preserved lemon, nutty and clotted cream complexity.

Viña Leyda Reserva

Syrah 2011, San Antonio, 13.5% - what I love most about this wine is the way it combines amazing freshness with complexity. Notes of roasted meat, dark fruit, black pepper lead into a dense yet refreshing flavour profile that is savoury, elegantly textured and wonderfully persistent.

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My high mark also rewards this wine's exceptional consistency and value for money.

★★★★★

4 STAR STANDOUT

Excellent, Cream of the 4★ Crop (7.8-8.4/10)

RE Chardonnay 2011

Casablanca, 12.7% - Another challenging, stirring wine from RE, a blend of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir matured on lees for nearly two years. It's comparable to champagne without the bubbles - invigorating in its vital acidity, with beautiful baked apple and yeasty complexity and a rich yet cleansing finish. Profoundly mineral.

SoldeSol Chardonnay

2009 Malleco, 13% I love the understatement, subtle tenacity and minerality here. Proper Chardonnay but not shouty. This wine is already a Chilean classic and is increasingly assured.

Ventisquero Grey Pinot

Noir 2011 Casablanca, 13% - strikes a different register from most Chilean Pinot. Real accent on freshness and linearity, with a zippy, crunchy red fruit flavour profile and smoky, leafy complexity. Dynamic, foodie and delicious.

Morandé Reserva Pinot

Noir 2011 Casablanca, 14.5% - proper Pinot, with real energy, focus and poise.

Despite the alcohol level (which you don't notice), it flirts with leanness but doesn't fall into angular harshness. Instead, it's packed full of sappy, earthy summer fruit flavours, tense and invigorating. Grown up Pinot. Will benefit from a bit of time in bottle too.

Mayu Syrah Reserva

2010 Elqui, 14% - vibrant aromatics and a spicy, layered palate profile. This is a wine that grins like a Cheshire cat: it has everything you'd expect of Syrah from its peppery, black olive aromatics to its nippy acidity and bittersweet, juniper-infused finish. Benchmark stuff.

Morandé Edición Limitada Sauvignon

Blanc 2011 Casablanca, 13% - eerily reminiscent of Semillon with its waxy, limey, honeycomb complexity. Hugely layered and impressive: it's fermented in large oak vats so has a creamy, nutty character overlaying the citric freshness.

Casa Marín Cipreses Sauvignon Blanc 2010

San Antonio, 13.5% - both the Laurel and Cipreses are impressive Sauvignons: intense, structured and invigorating. But this one just has the edge, with its honeyed, glazed grapefruit character with notes of fennel and clotted cream. Beautiful Sauvignon.

De Martino Limávida

2011 Maule, 13.8% - I tasted a pre-bottling vat sample of this but had to include it here.

This field blend planted in 1945 (mainly Malbec, with a bit of Carmenere, Carignan and Tannat) has always been a high point in the De Martino portfolio. Now, with the renewed emphasis on elegance at the winery, it's really coming into its own. Smoky, creamy blue fruit aromatics lead into a tense, juicy, resonant flavour profile. Precise and superlative.

Marks & Spencer Secano Estate Sauvignon

Gris 2011 San Antonio, 13.5% - beguiling, succulent, enveloping wine made by Viña Leyda in conjunction with M&S. Sensational value, with flavours of pea pod and honeyed citrus, both grippy and taut yet lush and layered.

Volcanes de Chile

Parinacota 2010 Maule, 14% - this Syrah/Carignan blend is juicy and invigorating. Notes of warm earth and dark fruits. Rounded, mineral, sassy.

Apaltagua Signature Cabernet Sauvignon

2010 Pirque, 14% - figgy and herbal nose, complex and inviting. Firm, dense, gastronomic. Very impressive.

Undurraga T.H. Riesling

2011 San Antonio, 12.3% - beautiful lime and apple scent, with a hint of cream and toast. Pure, zingy and rounded - hard to fault. Lovely texture, grip and drinkability.

Calyptra Zahir Cabernet Sauvignon Limited Edition 2008

Cachapoal,

★★★★★

WINES

13.5% you have to disregard the silly heavy bottle and garish label. Because inside... ah, the scent tumbles out of the glass, creamy cassis, nutty, gently resinous. OK, so it's a bit stereotypically Chilean but it's hard not to love, with its dense fine tannin, fresh acidity, lovely balance and evolution. With a bit less richness and heft, this could be great.

Lapostolle Collection

El Silo Syrah 2011 Elqui, 12.8% - winemaker Andrea León has coaxed some beautifully savoury, lifted flavours of black olives, black pepper and fresh meat from this coastal Elqui Syrah. It's juicy, crisp and invigorating, really food friendly and a brilliant terroir wine.

Undurraga T.H. Pinot

Noir 2011 Leyda, 13.8% - an intriguing wine. After 10 years of making 'nice, balanced, fruit-driven' Leyda Pinot, Rafael Urrejola threw caution to the wind in 2011 and used 40% whole cluster fermentations. This is a risky strategy and can make for edgy wine: this one has apparently taken a few years to settle down. When I tried it, it still had rough edges but was also cogent, grippy, sturdy, sappy and structured. Its imperfections made it all the more compelling.

Casa Marín Miramar

Syrah 2009 San Antonio, 12% - lean, pure, driven. Very refreshing and focused, with compact tannin and a cleansing finish.

García & Schwaderer Sofia Pinot Noir 2011

Casablanca, 13.5% - has a levity and perfume to it that is quite captivating, and very un-Chilean. Sappy, earthy, summer fruit notes. Savoury, smooth and refreshing. 'It's from the French school,' says winemaker Connie Schwaderer: picked early, fermented using some stems. Bravo.

Viña Casablanca

Cefiro Pinot Noir 2012 Casablanca, 14% the kind of wine that builds up in effect almost exponentially. Subdued aromas of smoke, leaf and undergrowth translate into a gorgeously succulent palate profile, cogent and winning. Soft plush tannic texture, layered fruit and savoury spice: stylish, very engaging.

Cono Sur

Reserva Especial

Gewürztraminer 2012 Casablanca, 13% - not your typical lush, low-acid Gewürz but still wonderfully perfumed (rose, lychee) and succulent, with a gently spicy, crunchy finish. Elegant texture and breadth, great value.

Volcanes de Chile

Tectonia Pinot Noir

2010 Bío Bío, 12.9% vigorous, smoky, sappy and cogent. Chile needs its Pinots to speak to you in a multitude of dialects and this is one of them: gentle but insistent. A cloudy coastal site over black sand soils in Patahual together with some clever winemaking by Pilar Díaz has made a very smart, individual Pinot: light, pure, elegant.

Casa Marín Estero Vineyard Sauvignon

Gris 2011 Lo Abarca, 13.5% - a consistently delightful example of this little-known grape variety. Rich, honeyed complexity is offset by brisk citric acidity. Spicy but grounded, with a lovely rich texture and fresh finish. Great with smoked mackerel and horseradish toasts.

RE Cabergnan 2009

Maule, 14.5% - as well as eclectic Casablanca whites, RE (and sister brand Viña Roja) does a fine line in old-vine Maule reds. This is a powerful but seductively textured blend of old-vine, dry-farmed Carignan (40%) and Cabernet (60%) from Loncomilla.

García y Schwaderer

Vigno 2010 Maule, 13.8% - probably my favourite Vigno to date. Too many south-country Carignans fall into excess, with scarifying tannin, scorching alcohol and searing acidity. But this one is tamed without being neutered. It's floral and earthy as well as dense and ripe-fruited. Fine, firm tannic architecture. Very good.

Lapostolle Collection Syrah El Rosario 2011

San Antonio, 14.1% - succulent but grippy, with malty, floral hints and plenty of dark fruit. Lots going on here, excellent tannic finesse. Masculine - but suave.

Erasmus Late Harvest

Torontel 2008 Maule, 12.5% - nectar, Chilean style. Made from a parcel of 60-year-old vines by Italian count

★★★★★

WINES

Francesco Marone Cinzano, he of the vermouth dynasty and highly regarded Brunello estate Col d'Orcia. The grapes were dried on rafters for three months before being aged in barrels. The result is unctuous but beautifully harmonious, with viscous layers of grape marmalade, dried mint and ginger biscuit flavours. A proper vino da meditazione – to be drunk by itself in a serene armchair.

Aristos Duque d'A Grand Cabernet du Chili 2008 Cachapoal, 14% - the super fine yet firm tannins are what mark out the Aristos Cabs. They also tend to be a bit too minty and rich, to my mind, but there's also a lovely leafy, herbal tone to them, and this one is developing a comely tobacco scent as well. Avuncular.

Concha y Toro Don Melchor 2007 Puente Alto, 14.5% - classic wine from an excellent vintage. Suffused with aromas of candle wax, warm earth and bloody red fruit. Fine firm tannin, good grip and terroir feel, layers of spicy fruit. Gravelly, long, classy. Has a glossiness and swagger that's seductive, even if a bit more reticence and elegance would serve it well.

Cono Sur Ocio Pinot Noir 2011 Casablanca, 14% - it's big and kind of bowls you over. Definitely a rich style of Pinot, so not for everyone. But it's layered and complex and pretty compelling, if not the most graceful.

De Martino Single Vineyard Parcela 5 Sauvignon Blanc 2011

Casablanca, 13% - pure, vibrant and citric. Tense and direct, the Tilda Swinton of Sauvignon Blancs. Cogent and pithy.

★★★★★

4 STAR Highly recommended wines (7-7/10)

García & Schwaderer Marina Sauvignon Blanc 2012 Casablanca, 13.5% - elegant, complex and taut, a real triumph in this warm vintage. It's serious but inviting, with hints of white flowers, anis and gooseberry. The 2013 is shaping up well too.

Valdivieso Blanc de Blancs Brut NV 12% - the base wine here is 2009, so this fizz spent extensive time on the lees (three years, in fact). It shows. There is a lovely autolytic (breadly, yeasty, biscuity) character here, underpinned by a pure, brisk Chardonnay acidity and focus. Classy stuff.

Montsecano Il Refugio Pinot Noir 2012

Casablanca, 14% - OK, it's not for everyone. But I can't help but be won over by its immediacy and distinctive nature, with leaping scents of fresh blackberry and violets and elegantly earthy, fine-grained palate profile. It's a

bit hot on the finish but it's delightful, heart-warming stuff.

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Sauvignon Blanc 2012

San Antonio, 13% - vibrant, dynamic style, very pure and complex. Invigorating wine in this rejuvenated line.

Falernia Donna Maria Syrah 2010 Limarí, 14.5% - a venture south for the Elqui specialist and a worthwhile one too. Engaging, dense and super fine textured red with notes of roasted peppers, black olive and fresh meat. Bold but also savoury and scented. Great value.

Cono Sur Reserva Especial Riesling 2012

Bío Bío, 13.5% - perhaps not quite so focused and taut as in other vintages, this is nonetheless wonderfully apple-scented, creamy textured Riesling from southern Chile.

San Pedro 1865 Limited Edition Syrah 2010

Elqui, 14.5% - creamy, spicy, beguiling Syrah with notes of baked herbs, grilled meat and dark fruit. Bold and vivid, perhaps a touch overdone on the finish.

Cono Sur Single Vineyard Block 21 Viento Mar Pinot Noir 2011

San Antonio, 14% - elegant earthy summer berry aromas with smoky hints. Good acidity, layered, gently bittersweet. Very nice.

★★★★★

WINES

Neyen 2004 Apalta, 14% - a wine that stood out from a recent vertical. A blend of 70% Carmenere with 30% Cabernet, this is savoury, dense and still youthful. It's perhaps not the cleanest – there's a hint of animalistic rusticity in there – but it's not at all dried out and has delightful roasted pepper complexity.

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Sauvignon Blanc Los Boldos Vineyard Block 5 2011 Casablanca, 13% - steely, concentrated and ageworthy. Verges on austerity but this will mature well, with notes of fresh herbs and ripe lemon.

Mayu Sauvignon Blanc 2012 Elqui, 13.5% - bursting with nettle, citrusy, tomato leaf freshness, this is pure, mid-weight and invigorating Sauvignon.

Montsecano Pinot Noir 2012 Casablanca, 13.5% - much like the Refugio, this has delightful aromatics with notes of earthy, herbal dark fruit and wild flowers. It's juicy, grippy and energetic but a touch overdone on the finish. Not the perfect wine but honest and engaging.

Apaltagua Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2012 San Antonio, 13.5% - brisk, tangy style with nice roasted herbs and lemony freshness. Great value.

Volcanes de Chile Tectonia Sauvignon Blanc 2011 Leyda, 13.5% -

complex notes of honey, pear and grapefruit come together in this classic Leyda Sauvignon made with an accent on freshness and elegant texture.

Viña Leyda Reserva Pinot Noir 2011 Leyda, 14.5% - invigorating and foodie. Tiny bit hot on the finish but there are some lovely red fruit, gently resinous flavours that are very Chilean, plus some leafy freshness that isn't always the case. Good value.

Montes Outer Limits Sauvignon Blanc

2011 Zapallar, 13% - spicy, broad, intense and thrilling. Reminiscent of a light-bodied Leyda in its nettle, wood-smoke and mineral style. Nice texture and persistence.

Morrison's The Best Pinot Noir 2012 Casablanca, 13.5% - great value Chilean Pinot sourced from William Cole by a UK supermarket whose wine range has improved immeasurably of late. Earthy, savoury and with a touch of warming spice on the finish.

Pérez Cruz Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Maipo, 13.5% - fine, refreshing and engaging. Has the hallmarks of Alto Maipo – figgy minty dark fruit, along with a touch of black pepper – but in a fresh and lifted format.

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 Puente Alto, 14.5% -

creamy, glossy and instantly appealing. To be critical, it is quite international in style and hot on the finish. But it also has lovely gravelly layers with serious tannin and well integrated acidity.

Casas del Bosque Gran Reserva Syrah 2011

Casablanca, 13.5% - dark, inky style with a fine peppery streak at its heart. It could still be toned down even further but its svelte, glossy character works well. The Pequeñas Producciones Syrah is also worth a try.

Top Winemakers Chile 100 Barricas de Chile

2011 14.5% - this intriguing project has been running for a few years now. Co-ordinator Rafael Prieto invites winemakers to collaborate by donating wines and helping make blends. It has a value in its emphasis on co-operation – often sorely lacking in Chile – but the wine isn't gimmicky. This elegant, cogent, heart-warming red follows on from some serious efforts from the 2007 and 2010 vintages.

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Chardonnay 2011 Limarí, 14% - this range has improved lately, with more accent on terroir and less on crowd-pleasing. This is not to say these aren't appealing wines – this is grown-up Limarí with elegantly layered, savoury flavours of baked apples, fresh nuts and warm stones. Broad but moreish, and with lovely juicy acidity to sustain it.

★★★★★

WINES



Undurraga T.H.

Sauvignon Blanc 2012

Lo Abarca, 13.5% - winemaker Rafael Urrejola has worked his magic on this despite the hot vintage, imbuing it with freshness and focus. Mineral, layered and punchy, a lovely terroir wine.

Pérez Cruz Cot 2011

Maipo, 14% - a floral perfume pervades the wine, with delicate herbal, earthy hints too. 'Malbec is like a sponge for terroir,' comments winemaker Germán Lyon. Lots of black fruit succulence, fine gravelly tannin, hard not to love.

Cono Sur Single Vineyard Block 25

Syrah La Palma 2011 San Antonio, 14% - leafy dark fruit with toasty hints and chocolate notes. Smooth, dense and artfully done.

SoldeSol Pinot Noir 2011

Traiguén, Malleco, 12.5% - gently earthy and herbal, it teases and tantalises rather than overwhelms. Refreshing and elegantly gastronomic, with notes of redcurrant jelly. Could do with a touch more scent and tangy grip, though, as per the 2010. Promising nonetheless.

Lapostolle Collection Carmenère Portezuelo

2010 Colchagua, 13.8% - lovely earthy, peppery perfume with red fruit freshness. Pure, lifted and delicious, wonderful medium-bodied style. Apparently winemaker Andrea León 'freaked out a bit' during fermentation when she was worried she'd harvested

too early and the wine was going to be hard and green. Not a bit of it. Brave new Carmenere.

Tabalí Reserva Especial Pinot Noir 2012

Limarí, 13.5% - perfumed, juicy, serious stuff. Summer fruits flavours with floral notes make for an engaging, savoury, fine-grained red with a touch of spice. Pretty persistent. Could have a touch less alcohol and more focus.

Seña 2010 Aconcagua, 14% - I've tasted this a few times recently, perhaps most memorably in mid-2012 when it was pitted blind against the likes of Châteaux Lafite, Margaux, Tignanello and Sassicaia. It's a rich yet self-assured style, classically Chilean in its earthy, bay, minty cassis flavours, but also very elegant texturally. I continue to find it a bit too hot and rich and I'd love a little more nuance in the aromatics. Something along the lines of the brilliant 1995 and 1997 Señas.

Laberinto Cenizas de Barlovento Sauvignon Blanc 2011

Maule, 12.5% I tried the 2007 recently and it had aged beautifully. This was gratifying because, tasting this wine, you have to keep the faith that it will evolve and flesh out. At the moment it's tense, flinty and super direct. Verges on sourness but actually it's well balanced and rounded. A lean, sinewy marathon runner rather than a bloated sprinter.

Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo Malbec 2012

Rapel, 13.5% - juicy, soft-textured, lots of wine here for the price. Toasty smoky damson and cassis richness.

Errázuriz The Blend Collection White 2012

13% - a rare Chilean wine that majors on subtlety and cries out for food. The blend of Marsanne, Roussanne and Viognier is reminiscent of the southern Rhône or central Italy in style, quite reticent in its dried herb character and gently mouth-coating texture.

Miguel Torres Reserva de Pueblo País 2012

Secano Interior, 12% - wow! This is more than a wine; it is a statement. País has for centuries been derided as a sub-standard wine grape but this joyful, vivid, revitalising wine changes everything. Waves of sweet cherry fruit wash over and invigorate the palate; it's like Beaujolais beefed up with a dollop of spicy Syrah.

Loma Larga Cabernet Franc 2010

Casablanca, 14.5% - punchy, vivid stuff. Lovely leafy, graphite aromas together with red pepper and dark fruit. Firm tannins and spicy finish. A bit awkward but good vibrancy. Saumur-born winemaker Cédric Nicolle bringing Loire expertise to Chile.

Quintay Q Syrah 2011

Casablanca, 14.5% - elegant, expressive coastal Syrah with a smooth, grippy palate profile and black olive/peppery

WINES



complexity. Should develop in the bottle well too.

Tara white wine 1 2011

Atacama, 13% - fascinating 'natural' style wine made in tiny quantities (409 bottles, to be precise) in Huasco, an experimental new northern vineyard run by Ventisquero. Mainly Chardonnay, with a touch of Viognier, made with the aid of foot-treading and stainless steel barrels, its yeasty, crème-caramel and apricot aromas are underscored by a brisk green apple acidity. Different, edgy, rustic and fun. Worth a try.

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Cabernet Sauvignon

2009, Pirque, 14.5% - a smart, well judged Cab with earthy, roasted herb and plum flavours. Juicy, fresh and hints of warm gravel. Nicely done. However, on the evidence of this and the 2010, I'd like to see more freshness and less heft in the wine. Less is more.

Chocalán Reserva Cabernet Franc 2011

Maipo, 14% - a creamy, plush, glossy nose is elegantly contradicted by a grippy, serious palate profile with graphite hints and a persistent finish.

Quintay Clava Pinot Noir 2011

Casablanca, 14% - good fluid, spiced berry character with earthy, malty hints. Very smart. The posher 'Q' is good too but this just nips it for me in value terms.

Clos des Fous Cabernet Sauvignon 2011

14% - pretty old school stuff, but with great energy and terroir conviction. Dried fruit and herbs, tobacco and gravel scents, and with a lithe, fulsome flavour profile.

Nativa Terra Reserva Carmenere 2009 Valle Central, 13.5% - really vivid, joyous stuff. What Carmenere can and should be - refreshing, peppery, savoury and crunchy. The firm tannin and bittersweet twang on the finish means it definitely benefits from food - it went down a treat with chorizo burgers and lamb kofta kebabs.

Cono Sur Block No 18 Single Vineyard El Recurso Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Maipo, 13.6% - expressive, firm, gastronomic. Should develop well in bottle.

William Fèvre Little Quino Pinot Noir 2012

Malleco, 12.5% - very pale, with cherry jam aromas and a lively, sappy and fairly forceful flavour profile. Quite edgy and rustic, a lean, fine grained style that is not the usual Chilean Pinot fare, and all the better for it. Good potential.

Morandé Reserva Gewürztraminer 2011

Casablanca, 13% - understated, herbal style with lovely texture and balance. Succulent and smooth.

Miguel Torres Cordillera Chardonnay 2011 Limarí, 13.5% - like a rich Macon or Pouilly-Fuissé, this is full of

honeyed lemon and apple fruit, with a crisp acidity and elegantly creamy finish. Classic savoury/saline Limari character on the finish. Very moreish, well made.

Tirazis Syrah 2011

Casablanca, 14.5% - leaping aromas of tapenade, bacon fat and inky dark fruit. I'd prefer it to have slightly less alcohol and ripe fruit, but it's impressive.

Cono Sur 20 Barrels Sauvignon Blanc 2012

Casablanca, 12.5% - it wasn't easy to make good Sauvignon in 2012, but here's one. Inviting notes of pressed herbs, fennel, chalk and citrus rind on the nose. Elegant texture, good citric depth. Not a blockbuster but vivacious and nicely textured.

Villard Expresión Reserve Pinot Noir 2012

Casablanca, 13.5% - velveteen and stylish. Restrained aromas (earthy, floral dark fruit) lead into a succulent, plush flavour profile with fine-grained tannins. There's a graceful harmony to it all. Hangs together well, albeit a touch spicy on the finish. Classy stuff.

Miguel Torres Days of Summer Muscat 2012

Itata, 11.5% - it's not easy to make fresh Muscat this good. Light in alcohol, with crisp acidity offset by a small amount (14 g/l) of sugar, the overall impression is an exotic perfume suffused with ginger biscuit and grape notes that leads into a crunchy, succulent, pretty dry flavour profile.

WINES



Viña Leyda Single Vineyard Las Brisas Pinot Noir 2011 Leyda, 14% - cogent and rewarding. Quite rich in structure but the elegant red fruit and sous-bois character, with notes of roasted beans, make it savoury and attractive.

RE Pinotel 2011 Casablanca, 14% - this blend of Pinot Noir from Casablanca and Moscatel from Loncomilla is actually a pretty serious rosé: structured, juicy and with a slightly rustic, oxidative character and hint of tannin.

Valdivieso Single Vineyard Pinot Noir 2010 Leyda, 14% - big-boned and tons of fun. Purists will cite its excess; hedonists will relish its voluptuous luxuriance. Tons of creamy dark fruit, juicy, rounded, succulent and winning. Heart-warming.

Los Boldos Sensaciones Cabernet Sauvignon 2012 Cachapoal, 14.5% - this winery has (good) form with Cabernet but had fallen off lately, so it's nice to see it back on the money. Creamy, fluid, spicy and layered. Doesn't try too hard.

Canepa Magnificum Cabernet Sauvignon 2007 Puente Alto, 14.5% - I'm not sure whether this is an inspired or terrible name for a wine – but it suits. The quality of the 2007 vintage shines through, with lovely layers and texture with wood smoke and roasted pepper complexity.

Aquitania Lazuli Cabernet Sauvignon 2005 Maipo, 13.5% - classic Maipo Cab, well made and not overdone. Aromas of fig, eucalypt and warm earth lead into an elegantly mature flavour profile that still has the concentration and balance to age further. Fine and soft-textured tannin, well balanced alcohol, fresh acidity: classic in its style. Follows on from a very good 2004.

De Martino Viejas Tinajas Cinsault 2012 Coelum, 13% - although it's not quite as fresh and arresting as the delightful debut 2011, this is still a wonderful wine. It's packed full of spiced cherry fruit, with a lovely gentle earthy, grainy texture. Made in tinaja earthenware pots with minimal intervention. A joyful, light-hearted country wine for raising the spirits.

Clos des Fous Locura 1 Chardonnay 2011 Cachapoal, 14% - a Chilean take on Chablis, this is mineral, tangy and fresh. It speaks of icy night air in the vineyard and an assured hand in the winery. Appley, mineral aromas and good length. Stylish.

Casas del Bosque Late Harvest Riesling 2011 Casablanca, 11.5% - rich and luscious but very well balanced in this style. Oodles of apricot, barley sugar flavours with tangy acidity underneath.

Santa Alicia Reserva Pinot Noir 2012 Bío Bío, 13.5% - doesn't try too hard and is all the better for it. Creamy red fruit flavours with a fresh yet rounded palate profile. Not the finished article but self-contained and elegantly made.

Villalobos Carignan Reserva 2012 Colchagua, 12% - the fourth version of this utterly refreshing, wonderfully wild wine. Un-trained vines grow up trees and bushes and are pruned by horses in this 60-year-old vineyard in Lolol, coastal Colchagua. Sculptor Enrique Villalobos' sons Rolando and Martín are the part-time winemakers and craft a pale purple wine with scents of warm earth and wild berries. Juicy, floral and lifted, with elegant medium body and a gently grainy, earthy texture. Very appealing, and a notch up from the 2011.

De Martino Las Cruces Single Vineyard Old Bush Vines 2008 Cachapoal, 13.5% - Harks back to an earlier era of De Martino winemaking but it has matured nicely, with toffee damson fruit and baked flowers. Rustic, honest and rounded. Great with sausages.

Louis-Antoine Luyt Trequilemu Carignan 2010 Empedrado, 12.9% - wild and rustic, this has a feral, wild berry character and a juicy, dense, earthy flavour profile. Resonant and invigorating – if not for everyone.

WINES



Lagar de Bezana Syrah 2010 Alto Cachapoal, 14.5% - grown-up Syrah, with elegant floral, peppery, dark fruit aromas. It's a bit hot on the finish but has decent savoury appeal.

Santa Rita Medalla Real Gran Reserva Carmenere 2009 Colchagua, 14% - high-toned, with notes of bergamot, tar and wild flowers. Dense, high-octane stuff but with decent balance. Rich, smooth, satisfying.

Viu Manent Vibo Viñedo Centenario 2011 Colchagua, 14.5% - a blend of old-vine Cabernet, Malbec and Petit Verdot from Cunaco. Very dense and complex, with notes of roasted pepper, malt and vodka. Brooding but not brow-beating; it's big, burly and boisterous. Could still do with toning down a bit but impressive nonetheless.

De Martino Reserva Legado Carmenere 2011 Maipo, 13.5% - it's fresh! Hallelujah! Bright dark cherry fruit with leafy hints. Smooth, with graphite inflections, juicy and succulent, not at all sweet or over-bearing. Wonderfully judged.

Emiliana Signos de Origen Chardonnay/Roussanne/Marsanne 2012 Casablanca, 14.5% - apple and honeysuckle perfume. Rich, broad textured but nicely grounded. It's a heady style but well balanced.

Miguel Torres Nectaría Botrytis Riesling 2009 Curicó, 14.5% - dense, brisk and with a twangy bittersweet orange peel finish. It verges on austerity – give it a few years more in bottle – but this is now a regularly impressive wine.

★★★★★
3 STAR
Recommended (6-6.9/10)

Cono Sur Cosecha Noble Late Riesling 2011 Bío Bío, 12% - a counterpoint to the excellent dry Riesling work by Adolfo Hurtado, this is a succulent, appley, gently bittersweet pudding wine that works really rather well. Good value, too.

J Bouchon Las Mercedes Ensamblaje Blanco 2012 Maule, 13.5% - fragrant, succulent blend of Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Chardonnay. Honeyed and generous but fresh. French winemaker Patrick Valette advises; they also make a good Sauvignon Blanc under the same brand.

Errázuriz Don Maximiano Founder's Reserve 2010 Aconcagua, 14.5% - glossy, creamy, dense stuff. Noticeably not as minty or exaggerated as previous examples, with some engaging fresh peppery notes too. Fine, crunchy. Could benefit from more harmony and restraint, but it's creditable – and improving.

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Riesling 2011 Casablanca, 11.5% - lovely limey purity here, although it tapers off on the finish. You sense some really good raw material and potential here but it could use a bit more oomph and concentration. If you have the patience, wait for the stunning 2013.

Tamaya T Malbec 2011 Limarí Costa, 14.5% - Replete. Verges on being OTT, with tons of floral, ripe damson and huge concentration. But it's not sweet or too burly, instead flecked with graphite, floral tones. A work in progress but some great raw material here.

Luis Felipe Edwards Cien100 Carignan 2011 Maule, 14.5% - inky, dense and bold. A bit overdone on the tannin and alcohol, but there's some nice insistent earthy dark fruit character here.

Mayu Malbec Reserva 2012 Elqui, 14.5% - vivid aromas of violets, dark chocolate and black pepper are immediately engaging. Bittersweet dark fruit on the palate, a little lacking in structure and core focus but hugely promising in its lift and brio.

Vistamar Sepia Reserva Merlot 2011 Romeral, 13.5% - lovely juicy peppery style, rounded and smooth but fresh and lifted too.

La Roncière Mousai Merlot 2009 Colchagua, 13.5% - fresh, balanced,

WINES

harmonious and savoury. Doesn't try too hard, which is its great beauty. Earthy dark fruit, some dusty floral hints too.

De Martino Viejas Tinajas Muscat 2012

Itata, 13% - a mixture of grape jam and ginger biscuits, with a lovely succulent yet dry palate profile, and a lingering finish. This is Chile's first 'orange' wine, made by leaving the juice on the skins in tinaja clay jars for six months.

Botalcura Nebbiolo

2009 Maule, 14% - bright floral, black cherry aromas. Juicy, creamy flavour profile with fine firm tannins and a soft finish. A happy memory from the year before the winery was destroyed in the 2010 earthquake (though the brand lives on).

Viña Leyda Lot 21 Pinot Noir 2011 Leyda, 14% - spicy vigorous style with an elegant texture and certain minerality to it.

Clos des Fous Latuffa Pinot Noir 2010 Traiguén, 14% - ginger and summer fruit flavours, with a friendly nip of tannin. Nice harmony but could use a bit more length and core.

Luis Felipe Edwards Marea Pinot Noir 2011

Leyda, 14% - lovely floral earthy dark fruit perfume but it's a bit too contrived and hot on the finish. Shame – with a bit less intervention and slightly earlier harvest, this could have been fabulous.

Falernia Carmenère

Reserva 2011 Elqui, 15% - a delightful oddity from northern Chile, this dense, inky Carmenère was made using the Italian 'appassimento' technique of drying the grapes on the vine. The result is treacly with notes of roasted pepper and soy; the gently bittersweet, spicy, hedonistic finish is full-on but balanced. Original.

Viña Casablanca Cefiro Reserva Cabernet

Sauvignon 2011 Maipo, 13.5% - brooding tobacco and juicy palate. Accent on freshness, cleverly made.

Vistamar Late Harvest

Moscatel 2012 Limarí, 12% - rich apricot and honey flavours. Nicely balanced, good value.

Artifice Argentum Pinot Noir 2012 Casablanca, 13.5% - smoky and meaty, with some good tension on the palate. It's a muscular but well made style.

Tamaya T Blanc de Blancs Brut Nature 2010 Limarí, 12% - a definite step up from the 2009 vintage, this fizz is zingy, layered and persistent. It's not the finished article but shows good potential in its freshness and biscuit complexity.

Kingston Tobiano Pinot Noir 2011 Casablanca, 14% - I've long been a fan of Kingston's spicy Syrahs but I feel that lately the wines have fallen into excess. This is one

of the more successful wines, a sappy, nettley Pinot with a vigorous palate profile, plenty of layers, and a spicy warming finish.

Tamaya T Syrah

2011 Limarí Costa, 14% - tremendous aromatic complexity – with notes of tar, syrupy cassis chocolate, olives, meat – translates into a slightly stodgy, top-heavy flavour profile. Very impressive but not hugely refreshing or drinkable.

Cono Sur Bicicleta

Malbec 2011 Colchagua, 13% - silky and juicy, a lovely easy-going red shot through with floral and peppery freshness.

Matetic Coralillo Pinot Noir 2011 San Antonio, 14% - juicy, succulent and with a touch of spice. Engaging and deftly made, with flavours of creamy red fruit.

Cono Sur Bicicleta Pinot Noir rosé 2012 Bío Bío, 13% - Good to see a lovely commercial Pinot rosé – expressive and juicy yet crisp. Great value.

Armidita Pajarete Moscatel Vin del

Desierto 2011, Atacama, 14% - easy-going honeyed Muscat, with flavours of grape marmalade and glazed cream. Could do with a bit more freshness and zip but creditable.

★★★★★

WINE SUMMARY

An A-Z of wines rated and reviewed in this brief. Wineries in bold are profiled in the producer section.

Apaltagua Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2012
★★★★★

Apaltagua Signature Cabernet Sauvignon 2010
★★★★★

Aquitania Lazuli Cabernet Sauvignon 2005
★★★★★

Aristos Duque d'A Grand Cabernet du Chili 2008
★★★★★

Aristos Duquesa d'A Chardonnay 2008
★★★★★

Armidita Pajarete Moscatel 2011
★★★★★

Artifice Argentum Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★

Botalcura Nebbiolo 2009
★★★★★

Calyptra Gran Reserva Single Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2010
★★★★★

Calyptra Zahir Cabernet Sauvignon Limited Edition 2008
★★★★★

Canepa Magnificum Cabernet Sauvignon 2007
★★★★★

Casa Marín Cipreses Sauvignon Blanc 2010
★★★★★

Casa Marín Estero Vineyard Sauvignon Gris 2011
★★★★★

Casa Marín Miramar Riesling 2010
★★★★★

Casa Marín Miramar Syrah 2009
★★★★★

Casas del Bosque Gran Reserva Syrah 2011
★★★★★

Casas del Bosque Late Harvest Riesling 2011
★★★★★

Chocalán Reserva Cabernet Franc 2011
★★★★★

Clos des Fous Cabernet Sauvignon 2011
★★★★★

Clos des Fous Latuffa Pinot Noir 2010
★★★★★

Clos des Fous Locura 1 Chardonnay 2011
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Casillero del Diablo Malbec 2012
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Don Melchor 2007
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Cabernet Sauvignon 2010
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Chardonnay 2011
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Marqués de Casa Concha Sauvignon Blanc 2012
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Cabernet Sauvignon 2009
★★★★★

WINE SUMMARY

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Riesling 2011
★★★★★

Concha y Toro Terrunyo Sauvignon Blanc Los Boldos Vineyard Block 5 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur 20 Barrels Sauvignon Blanc 2012
★★★★★

Cono Sur Bicicleta Malbec 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur Bicicleta Pinot Noir rosé 2012
★★★★★

Cono Sur Cosecha Noble Late Riesling 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur Ocio Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur Reserva Especial Gewürztraminer 2012
★★★★★

Cono Sur Reserva Especial Riesling 2012
★★★★★

Cono Sur Single Vineyard Block 18 El Recurso Cabernet Sauvignon 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur Single Vineyard Block 21 Viento Mar Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Cono Sur Single Vineyard Block 25 Syrah La Palma 2011
★★★★★

Cousiño Macul Antiguas Reservas Cabernet Sauvignon 1998
★★★★★

De Martino Las Cruces Single Vineyard Old Bush Vines 2008
★★★★★

De Martino Limávida 2011
★★★★★

De Martino Reserva Legado Carmenere 2011
★★★★★

De Martino Single Vineyard Parcela 5 Sauvignon Blanc 2011
★★★★★

De Martino Viejas Tinajas Cinsault 2012
★★★★★

De Martino Viejas Tinajas Muscat 2012
★★★★★

Emiliana Signos de Origen Chardonnay/Roussanne/Marsanne 2012
★★★★★

Erasmus Late Harvest Torontel 2008
★★★★★

Errázuriz Don Maximiano Founder's Reserve 2010
★★★★★

Errázuriz The Blend Collection White 2012
★★★★★

Errázuriz Wild Ferment Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★

Falernia Carmenère Reserva 2011
★★★★★

Falernia Donna Maria Syrah 2010
★★★★★

García & Schwaderer Marina

CHILE WINE BRIEF

WINE SUMMARY

Sauvignon Blanc 2012
★★★★★

García & Schwaderer Sofia Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

García y Schwaderer Vigno 2010
★★★★★

J Bouchon Las Mercedes Ensamblaje Blanco 2012
★★★★★

Kingston Tobiano Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

La Roncière Mousai Merlot 2009
★★★★★

Laberinto Cenizas de Barlovento Sauvignon Blanc 2011
★★★★★

Lagar de Bezana Syrah 2010
★★★★★

Lapostolle Collection Carmenère Portezuelo 2010
★★★★★

Lapostolle Collection Syrah El Rosario 2011
★★★★★

Lapostolle Collection Syrah El Silo 2011
★★★★★

Loma Larga Cabernet Franc 2010
★★★★★

Los Boldos Sensaciones Cabernet Sauvignon 2012
★★★★★

Louis-Antoine Luyt Trequilemu Carignan 2010
★★★★★

Luis Felipe Edwards Cien100

Carignan 2011
★★★★★

Luis Felipe Edwards Marea Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Marks & Spencer Secano Estate Sauvignon Gris 2011
★★★★★

Matetic Coralillo Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Matetic EQ Syrah 2007
★★★★★

Mayu Malbec Reserva 2012
★★★★★

Mayu Sauvignon Blanc 2012
★★★★★

Mayu Syrah Reserva 2010
★★★★★

Miguel Torres Cordillera Chardonnay 2011
★★★★★

Miguel Torres Days of Summer Muscat 2012
★★★★★

Miguel Torres Nectaría Botrytis Riesling 2009
★★★★★

Miguel Torres Reserva de Pueblo País 2012
★★★★★

Montes Outer Limits Sauvignon Blanc 2011
★★★★★

Montecano Il Refugio Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★

Montecano Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★

Morandé Edición Limitada Sauvignon Blanc 2011
★★★★★

WINE SUMMARY

Morandé Reserva
Gewürztraminer 2011
★★★★★

Morandé Reserva Pinot Noir
2011
★★★★★

Morrison's The Best Pinot Noir
2012
★★★★★

Nativa Terra Reserva
Carmenere 2009
★★★★★

Neyen 2004
★★★★★

Pérez Cruz Reserva Cabernet
Sauvignon 2011
★★★★★

Pérez Cruz Cot 2011
★★★★★

Quintay Clava Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Quintay Q Syrah 2011
★★★★★

RE Cabergnan 2009
★★★★★

RE Chardonnair 2011
★★★★★

RE Pinotel 2011
★★★★★

RE Velado 2009
★★★★★

San Pedro 1865 Limited Edition
Syrah 2010
★★★★★

Santa Alicia Reserva Pinot
Noir 2012
★★★★★

Santa Carolina Estrella
de Oro Reserva Cabernet

Sauvignon 1967
★★★★★

Santa Rita Medalla Real Gran
Reserva Carmenere 2009
★★★★★

Seña 2010
★★★★★

SoldeSol Chardonnay 2009
★★★★★

SoldeSol Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Tabalí Reserva Especial Pinot
Noir 2012
★★★★★

Tamaya T Blanc de Blancs
Brut Nature 2010
★★★★★

Tamaya T Malbec 2011
★★★★★

Tamaya T Syrah 2011
★★★★★

Tara white wine 1 2011
★★★★★

Tirazis Syrah 2011
★★★★★

Top Winemakers Chile 100
Barricas de Chile 2011
★★★★★

Undurraga T.H. Cabernet
Sauvignon 2011
★★★★★

Undurraga T.H. Pinot Noir
2011
★★★★★

Undurraga T.H. Riesling 2011
★★★★★

Undurraga T.H. Sauvignon
Blanc 2012
★★★★★

CHILE WINE BRIEF

WINE SUMMARY

Valdivieso Blanc de Blancs
Brut NV
★★★★★

Valdivieso Single Vineyard
Pinot Noir 2010, Leyda
★★★★★

Ventisquero Grey Pinot Noir
2011
★★★★★

Villalobos Carignan Reserva
2012
★★★★★

Villard Expresión Reserve
Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★

Viña Casablanca Cefiro Pinot
Noir 2012
★★★★★

Viña Casablanca Cefiro
Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon
2011
★★★★★

Viña Leyda Lot 21 Pinot Noir
2011
★★★★★

Viña Leyda Reserva Pinot
Noir 2011
★★★★★

Viña Leyda Reserva Syrah
2011
★★★★★

Viña Leyda Single Vineyard
Las Brisas Pinot Noir 2011
★★★★★

Vistamar Late Harvest
Moscatel 2012
★★★★★

Vistamar Sepia Reserva Merlot
2011
★★★★★

Viu Manent Vibo Viñedo
Centenario 2011
★★★★★

Volcanes de Chile Parinacota
2010
★★★★★

Volcanes de Chile Tectonia
Pinot Noir 2010
★★★★★

Volcanes de Chile Tectonia
Sauvignon Blanc 2011
★★★★★

William Fèvre Little Quino
Pinot Noir 2012
★★★★★



ILLUSTRATION BY HELEN RICHARDS

CREDITS

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