

# Chilean whites

While Chile's reds can give you bang for your buck at £7, most exciting Chilean whites only start at the £10 mark, says Peter Richards MW. But that doesn't mean they don't represent value for money – here are 15 of his favourites



CHILEAN WHITES ARE coming of age. Challenging whites of real character and elegance are emerging from this exciting South American country; wines whose makers don't care what the market says but instead listen to their site, their grapes and their intuition.

With white wine, there's little room to hide; equally, there are bold statements to be made. It's an interesting time because it means Chile can't (and shouldn't) remain all things to all people. Keen-eyed and value-conscious readers will note that, among the following wines, only one is under £10. This is not a result of my expensive tastes. Unlike its reds, Chilean whites struggle to deliver real quality under the £7 to £8 mark (the ocean of cheap, bland Central Valley Sauvignonasse – all too often shoddily sold as 'Sauvignon Blanc' – is an obvious case in point).

Chile's best white winemakers are now focused not on delivering bargain-basement thrills but instead refining their art to craft wines of compelling individuality and refinement. This takes time and money; Chile's best whites are therefore becoming more expensive. However unpalatable this reality may be at a time of enforced austerity, the rewards are clear to taste. And the fact that these wines are now commonly £10 or more in no way means they no longer offer value for money: quite the opposite in many cases.

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New regions and varieties continue to appear on the Chilean wine map, in a country whose astonishing speed of evolution makes Usain Bolt look pedestrian. A decade ago the coastal regions of Aconcagua and Colchagua were populated by ruminants and surfers beating a path to the coast; these days they're prime cool-climate viticultural territory. As for varietal diversity, I'm tipping Sauvignon Gris to become a Chilean white forté in years to come, with its tangy yet succulent charms and clear point of difference on the global stage.

But the real powerhouses of Chilean white wine remain the Sauvignon Blancs and Chardonnays, which are becoming more diverse and deftly crafted by the vintage. Coastal Limarí and San Antonio are the hot properties for these two standard-bearers of Chilean white wine. Two long, cool vintages of 2010 and 2011, caressed by the ice-maiden hand of La Niña, offer crisply defined whites – though older vintages are also showing strongly, proof that Chile's top whites can and do age well in the bottle.

Does all this mean that Chile's whites are becoming its strongest suit, as *Decanter* contributing editor Andrew Jefford contended for Australian Chardonnay (*Decanter* panel tasting, March 2011 issue)? Not yet. But the way things are going, the future for Chilean whites looks to be very bright indeed.

Peter Richards MW is the *Decanter* World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile

These wines are a selection of those sampled, non-blind, at the annual Wines of Chile trade tasting in London in September

## 5- and 4-star Chilean whites



**Aristos, Duquesa Chardonnay, Cachapoal 2008** ★★★★★ 20pts/20

£50.67 Justerini & Brooks

Breathtaking. Stylistically and qualitatively reminiscent of grand cru white Burgundy from a warm, rich vintage. Yes it's expensive. The alcohol's high (though you can't taste it). But with its nutty, intensely savoury, intricately layered flavours, this is a new dimension in Chilean white wine.

Drink: 2011–2015. Alcohol: 14.5%



**Casa Marin, Estero Vineyard Sauvignon Gris, Lo Abarca 2010** ★★★★★ 18.5

£17 Blythe Valley Wines, Evertons, Everywine, Hay Wines, ND John, South American Wines Online, Swig, Wimbledon Wine Cellars, Woodwinters

Beguiling aromas of fresh hazelnuts, honeycomb and glazed lemons. Peachy flavours, luxuriant texture, tangy mineral finish. Intensely moreish.

Drink: 2011–2013. Alc: 13.5%



**Maycas del Limarí, Quebrada Seca Chardonnay, Limarí 2008** ★★★★★ 18.5

£20–£23 Berry Bros & Rudd, Corks Out, D Byrne, Fine Wine Sellers, Harrods, Slurp, Solent Cellar, Wine Society

A white whose subtle yet intense character needs time to reveal itself – I suggest decanting. Multilayered, refined and understated, with hints of blanched nut, red apple and delicate minerality. Drink: 2011–2015. Alc: 13.5%



**Cono Sur, 20 Barrels Limited Edition Chardonnay, Casablanca 2009** ★★★★★ 18

£13.99 Corkscrew Wines, Corks Out, Daylesford Organic, Slurp, Your Favourite Wines

A top-notch coastal site and superb winemaker. Creamy nose with red apple and toasted nuts. Flavours are rich and buttery but with refreshing underlying acidity. An open-knit and beautiful style. Drink: 2011–2014. Alc: 13.5%



**Undurruga, TH Sauvignon Blanc, Lo Abarca 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£10.95–£13.99 Bonafide Wines, Flint Wines, Hangingditch, Noel Young, Moreno, The Wine Society

Undurruga's TH line is one of the country's most consistently rewarding ranges. This coastal Sauvignon is wild, flinty and fennel-scented in aromatics, with a dense, mineral-infused palate. Drink: 2011–2013. Alc: 13.9%



**Matetic, Coralillo Gewurztraminer, San Antonio 2011** ★★★★★ 17.5

£12.60 Armit

A tiny production, often lost to frost. But what a wine – combining engaging notes of lychee and pear with a dry, elegantly textured palate that is food friendly and not at all overdone. Drink: 2011. Alc: 13.5%



**Ventolera, Sauvignon Blanc, Leyda 2009** ★★★★★ 17.5

£10.99–£11.25 Oddbins, Slurp

Spicy and flinty in style with notes of fennel and aniseed. Thrilling, bracing mouthfeel, with layered and refined fruit. Ageing well.

Drink: 2011–2013. Alc: 13.5%



**O Fournier, Alfa Centauri Sauvignon Blanc, Leyda 2009** ★★★★★ 18

£13.50–£18.95 Butlers Wine Cellar CPA Wines, Slurp

Defly oaked Sauvignons are starting to become a Chilean forte. This one has a creamy tangerine nose with a structured, layered palate. Elegantly drinkable and seriously complex.

Drink: 2011–2014. Alc: 14%



**Viña Leyda, Single Vineyard Kadun Sauvignon Gris, Leyda 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£10.95–£13 Butlers Wine Cellar, Great Grog, Harvey Nichols, Seckford, Waples Wines

Further proof that coastal Chilean Sauvignon Gris has the potential to be a world-beater. Gentle spice and beguiling richness underscored by juicy lemony acidity. Delicious. Drink: 2011–2013. Alc: 14%



**Quintay, Q Sauvignon Blanc, Casablanca 2010** ★★★★★ 17.5

£10.99 Eagle Wines, Good Wine Shop, Mill Hill Wines, North & South

Sourced from coastal Casablanca, incorporating 15% Leyda fruit and fermented in old oak barrels, this is a skilfully crafted Sauvignon packed with mineral concentration and citric succulence.

Drink: 2011–2013. Alc: 13%



**Casa Silva, Cool Coast Paredones Sauvignon Blanc, Colchagua 2010** ★★★★★ 17

£12.99–£14.95 Amps, Aveyrs, D Byrne, Field & Fawcett, MW2 Wines, Stainton Wines, Wine Rack

Reticent initially, the aromas emerge with notes of crisp green pepper, gooseberries and wet stone. The palate is crisp, crunchy and lime-scented, with lovely texture and breadth.

Drink: 2011. Alc: 13.5%



**Undurruga, TH Riesling, Lo Abarca 2010** ★★★★★ 18

£10.95–£13.99 Cornelius, Markinch, Moreno, The Wine Society

Winemaker Rafael Urrejola buys this Riesling from Casa Marin's vineyard in coastal San Antonio, matures it partly in old barrels and leaves a touch of residual sugar 'for roundness'.

Beautiful appley purity with a lovely succulence and finish. Drink: 2011–2016. Alc: 11.5%



**Errázuriz, Aconcagua Costa Chardonnay Wild Ferment, Aconcagua 2009** ★★★★★ 17.5

£11.50–£15.50 Dickens House Wine, Slurp, The Vintage House

Lovely, toasty, nutty nose with an oaky but still fresh and lemony savoury palate profile.

Drink: 2011. Alc: 13.5%



**Tabalí, Talinay Chardonnay, Limarí 2009** ★★★★★ 17.5

£14.75–£16.99 D Byrne, Jolly Vintner, Perfect Partners, Stone Vine & Sun

One of the country's most exciting vineyard projects on rolling limestone hillsides just 12km from the coast. Subtle aromas of apple rind and chalky minerality on a layered, graceful palate. Assertive structure but understated flavour.

Drink: 2011–2014. Alc: 13.5%



**Tabalí, Reserva Viognier, Limarí 2011** ★★★★★ 16.5

£8–£9 D Byrne, Highbury Vintners, Slurp, TJ Wines, The Vineyard (Dorking), Woodwinters

One of the country's best examples of this variety. Classic white pepper and apricot aromas, with a succulent, creamy-textured palate. Drink: 2011. Alc: 13.5%