

Chilean Carmenera

Since growers have started treating it with increasing respect, Carmenera has been on an upward trajectory in Chile – and the best is yet to come, reports Peter Richards MW

CARMENERA IS THE James Bond of wine grapes. It's mysterious, with a past shrouded in conjecture. No one knows how best to handle or contain it. It's often been on the ropes – for instance, when phylloxera virtually wiped it out in Bordeaux – but it has proved a dogged survivor, popping up in unexpected places. It goes under many pseudonyms, from 'Shelongzhu' (China) to 'Merlot Chileno' and (the best) 'Black Bordeaux' (Italy).

But it's Chile where the variety has made itself at home. After phylloxera, Bordeaux growers proved reluctant to replant Carmenera, because it was finicky, late-ripening and tricky to graft. But Chile was (and has remained) ostensibly phylloxera free and has the kind of warm, dry climate in which late-season reds can thrive. When Carmenera arrived in the mid-19th century, mixed plantings were the norm and somehow it was subsumed into the 'Merlot' category, known by growers as 'Chilean' or 'late' Merlot, and sold under the same moniker. Hence the distinctive, peppery style of Chilean 'Merlot'.

These days, Carmenera tends to be grown, made and promoted as a separate cultivar. Plantings have increased. And yet opinion within Chile remains divided. Many still believe Carmenera to be fundamentally limited, tricky to grow and good only for blends. Others point to Chile's short track-record with it and advise patience.

Rapid progress

Research has shed more light on the subject. Yerko Moreno at Talca University has provided answers to the long-standing questions about Carmenera's poor fruit set and clonal diversity. Casa Silva's micro-terroir project has provided guidance on Carmenera's most propitious microclimates (warm but with moderating influences) and soils (well-drained but not too fertile). Other growers are taking Carmenera out of what were traditionally deemed the best sites for it (hot, central valley sites on deep alluvial soils) and experimenting in markedly different terroirs, often with exciting results.

Central Colchagua and Cachapoal have long been Carmenera heartlands. Now though, it is spreading into cooler eastern (Andean) or western (Pacific-influenced) extremities. The likes of Elqui, Limarí, Aconcagua and Curicó are all finding success – while Maipo and Maule lead the field. Winemaking is increasingly nuanced, with less heavy-handed use of oak and extraction.

For now Carmenera remains a bit-player, but it attracts disproportionate interest and has many fans. For a country that often complains about lacking identity and narrative, Carmenera offers an intriguing back-story and potential for uniqueness.

Peter Richards MW is a wine writer, broadcaster and consultant, as well as DWWA Regional Chair for Chile



Map: Maggie Nelson

Chilean Carmenera: know your vintages

2016 Late season hit by torrential harvest rains gave lighter reds of variable quality that are approachable now.

2015 Hot, dry growing season gave effusive, engaging wines for early drinking. Drink to 2021.

2014 Spring frosts sent yields plummeting. Best wines are juicy and lifted. Drink to 2022.

2013 Late, rain-affected vintage. Bright, fresh wines of moderate

concentration. Drink through to 2019.

2012 Torrid heat. Drink up.

2011 A coolish year gave well defined, often excellent wines that are drinking well now.

2010 A long, dry growing season that gave some outstanding results. The best wines drink well now.

2009 Warm year, resulting in generous wines. Drink up.

Chilean Carmenera: the facts

Chile national wine vineyard 141,918ha

Carmenera plantings 10,861ha (8% of overall Chilean vineyard)

Growth in Carmenera 2005-2015 +59%

Volume produced (2016) 101 million litres

Key regions for Carmenera Colchagua (4,145ha), Maule (2,348ha), Cachapoal (2,102ha), Curicó (1,238ha), Maipo (991ha)

Carmenera & Carmenera blends UK retail sales (2016) 5.7m litres (up 7.5% on 2015)

Sources: SAG Catastro 2015, Origo 2016

The results

Disappointed with the quality on show from Carmeneres's Colchagua heartland, our panel found plenty of promise and much to discuss in other regions, says Tina Gellie

THE TWO SIDES of the Carmeneres coin certainly showed themselves in this tasting. Our experts were at once excited about its potential in Chile, but disappointed by the mediocrity of many examples – particularly from the variety's heartland.

'Carmeneres was once Chile's flagship in the same way that Malbec is for Argentina,' said Patricio Tapia. 'But about 10 years ago Wines of Chile decided that diversity was the key and Carmeneres was sort of forgotten. Meanwhile, in Argentina, they continued to experiment with Malbec: planting it at higher altitudes; in the north; in the south... So Chilean producers are still far from knowing all the various expressions or possibilities.'

Alistair Cooper agreed, saying that because the focus moved away from Carmeneres, 'I'm not sure it can ever be Chile's signature variety, and that's because it is extremely site-specific when compared to Malbec which does well almost everywhere in Argentina.'

Cooper said Colchagua is the 'spiritual home' of Carmeneres, but in this showing the region fared poorly. Peter Richards MW elaborated: 'The sea of mediocrity from Colchagua was the low point in this tasting. There was a blandness, a conformity and a dullness to many of the wines that is a product of overly warm-climate winemaking.' He said Carmeneres needs a long growing season but not a warm climate, which would allow producers to get the elegance they were currently trying to manipulate through acidification.

The tasting highlighted two standout regions: Maule and Maipo, where the diurnal temperature differences tempered the ripe fruit and added much-needed minty elegance, brightness, freshness and complexity. Richards commented on the diversity on offer from these regions: while many wines polarised the tasters, 'that's a good sign as it showed they appealed to a variety of palates and were pushing the boundaries'.

Cooper said while there were several nuanced 100%

'Carmeneres needs its obsessives and pioneers to push the boundaries and see what it can do' Peter Richards MW

varietal wines, he felt Carmeneres was best as a blending grape, needing 5% to 20% of one or more partners. 'One of the standouts was a blend with Cabernet Franc,' he said. 'It might be counterintuitive, but the perfume and pyrazine greenness of these two herbal grapes worked brilliantly together.' Tapia agreed and said growers should no longer fear pyrazine characters, and realise that picking earlier can give excellent results. Other successful blending partners were Syrah (giving spice) and Petit Verdot and Malbec (florality).

In terms of vintages, Cooper felt the few 2016s on show – from a cool vintage – were attractive, boding well for the future and would likely surpass the warm-vintage 2015s that made up the majority of wines tasted. 'Carmeneres is not a variety that is massively long lived,' he added. 'We didn't taste many more than 10 wines that would be drinking better in 2020 than they are now.' Tapia agreed and compared them to Loire Cabernet Francs for their tannin structure, green pyrazine notes and perfumed lift that were best appreciated within five years of release.

'There is this worrying notion that Carmeneres is a second-division variety that doesn't have the potential for greatness,' said Richards. 'That is wrong. It can be great, but Carmeneres needs its obsessives and pioneers to push the boundaries and see what it can do – like we've seen in Chile already with Pinot Noir.'

'On the whole,' he concluded, 'the wines are better than they've ever been, but we're seeing just the first hints of what could be a Carmeneres revolution with the right people driving it.'

The scores

129 wines tasted

Exceptional

0

Outstanding

4

Highly Recommended

23

Recommended

66

Commended

25

Fair

10

Poor

1

Faulty

0

Entry criteria: producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest releases of Chilean Carmeneres wines, with a minimum of 85% of the varietal in the blend

Outstanding 95–97pts



Cremaschi Furlotti, Single Vineyard, Loncomilla, Maule Valley 2015

Decanter average score: 96/100pts **Individual judges' scores:** Alistair Cooper 95 Peter Richards MW 96 Patricio Tapia 96

£13.99 (2013) Ministry of Drinks, Simply Wines Direct
Here in the heart of the Maule valley, it rains more (750mm) than areas further north such as Maipo, and the temperature variation between day and night is particularly pronounced. Cremaschi Furlotti's single-vineyard bottlings come from the best grapes grown on its Peñasco vineyards' alluvial and volcanic soils. The wine is aged 50% in new oak, with the other half split equally between second- and third-use barrels.

Alistair Cooper Vibrant floral nose, lively Morello cherry and cassis flavours, enriched by a peppery spiciness. Firm backbone of tannin.

Peter Richards MW An enticing nose of rich, dark fruit expanded by medicinal and wild herb aromas, leading to a juicy, grippy palate with an engaging wild edge. Dares to be different – really like this!

Patricio Tapia Full and rich, herbal and leather-infused red fruit, well-proportioned yet soft tannins. Seductive, creamy-textured finish.

Drink 2017–2021 **Alc** 13.5%



William Fèvre Chile, La Misión Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013

96 AC 95 PR 97 PT 95

£15 Exel
William Fèvre is a name long synonymous with Chablis, and the origins of this estate lie in his search for land beyond France, suitable for the production of high-quality Chardonnay. This led him at last to the door of Victor Pino Torche, the owner of a farm in the hamlet of San Juan de Pirque, Chile. Today it is managed by Victor's youngest son Gonzalo, with winemaking done by Felipe Uribe and input from the well-known consultant Pedro Parra. With fruit from nearby San Luis de Pirque, this is 89% Carmeneres with Cabernet Sauvignon, aged in oak for 12 months.

AC Effusively perfumed, with a lifted yet structured palate of enticing, tobacco-toned berry fruit widened by well-managed tannins. A lovely example of Old World meeting New World – bravo!

PR Attractive hints of maturity, with dried red berry fruit accompanying notes of tobacco amid an alluring herbal freshness, while fine, elegant tannins deliver complexity without heft. Long, stylish and classy.

PT Pretty, delicate and tightly wound, with a superb balance.

Drink 2017–2021 **Alc** 14%



Casa Donoso, Sucesor, Maule Valley 2013

95 AC 94 PR 95 PT 96

£33 Shawbury Vintners
Originally established at the historic La Oriental estate in 1987, Casa Donoso has gradually grown to encompass four vineyards in Maule, totalling 710ha. This has included expansion south into San Javier, and another 472ha in San Vicente to the north. A blend of 80% Carmeneres and 20% Malbec, this spends 24 months in French oak. Overseen by winemaker Felipe Ortiz, the Sucesor range has been developed to offer a range that's stylistically different to Casa Donoso's other bottlings.

AC A very drinkable style, with pronounced dark, wild fruit aromas leading to a cassis-drenched palate that unfolds onto a distinctly minty-fresh finish. Attractive and harmonious.

PR Hard not to like this. A lot of wine here, intelligently blended, with juicy, fresh yet rich dark fruit propelled by fine, grown-up tannins.

PT Brimming with black fruit, this is a beautifully voluptuous example.

Drink 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.5%



William Fèvre Chile, La Misión Reserva Especial, Maipo Valley 2015

95 AC 95 PR 96 PT 94

£11 Exel
Fèvre's other Outstanding wine in this tasting is similarly sourced from the old Maipo riverbank terraces of San Luis de Pirque, on permeable soils with good drainage. In this case though it is the turn of Cabernet Franc to play the supporting role, making up 8% of the final blend. Harvested in the first week of May, this saw slightly less oak, with 80% of the wine aged in barrel for a total of eight months and the remainder kept in tank, to give a juicier element to the wine.

AC Pretty aromatics with herbal and garrigue scents. Very Carmeneres on the palate, with supple tannins engraved by an exquisite floral character and enlivened by bright and finely poised acidity. Excellent.

PR Graceful black fruit aromas lead to a juicy, rounded and succulent palate with abundant length and elegance – beautiful stuff.

PT A medium-bodied, focused and refreshing style, with an attractive herbal edge to the fruit.

Drink 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.7% ➤

The judges

Alistair Cooper



Cooper moved back to the UK in 2006 after years working for wineries in Chile and Argentina. A wine writer and consultant, he has contributed to various publications including Decanter,

is resident wine expert for BBC Radio Oxford, and is now also writing his MW research paper.

Peter Richards MW



Richards is the DWWA Regional Chair for Chile and has published The Wines of Chile and his own Chile Wine Brief. He is a guest presenter on BBC1's Saturday Kitchen and, together

with his wife Susie Barrie MW, runs a wine school and wine festival in Winchester.

Patricio Tapia



Tapia is the DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina. He is the South American wine critic for Wine & Spirits magazine in the US, and also writes the annual Descorchados bilingual wine guide to

Argentinian, Chilean and Uruguayan wine.

Highly Recommended 90–94pts



Ventisquero, Queulat, Maipo Valley 2015 94 AC 91 PR 95 PT 95

N/A UK www.ventisquero.com

Beguiling and classic, with rich dark fruit aromas expanded by hints of mint and dark chocolate. Juicy, rounded and elegant, yet dense, with a welcome freshness on the finish. Deft, accomplished. **Drink** 2018–2021 **Alc** 13.5%



Casa Donoso, Bicentenario, Maule Valley 2015 93 AC 94 PR 94 PT 90

N/A UK www.casadonoso.cl

Beautifully gentle and fragrant violet aroma cedes to soft, subtle and refreshing flavours of black pepper and floral-imbued dark fruit, with a light and delicate touch. Lovely stuff! **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Morandé, One to One Estate Reserva, Maipo Valley 2014 91 AC 89 PR 91 PT 94

£9.99 All About Wine, Berkman

Herbal, wild berry aromas unveil an elegant palate bristling with notes of spice and cherry, yet is not too sweet-fruited, with a long and crisp finish. Food-friendly, in a grown-up style. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 14%



San Pedro, Castillo de Molina Reserva, Maule Valley 2015 91 AC 91 PR 94 PT 87

N/A UK www.vspwinegroup.com

An enticing, meaty and savoury nose unfolds onto a juicy, mellow palate with firm but supportive tannins, while a satisfying zip of acid keeps it fresh and lively. Very drinkable and characterful. **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.8%



Tarapacá, Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2015 91 AC 93 PR 89 PT 90

N/A UK www.vspwinegroup.com

A full and hedonistic style, with youthful, dark fruit aromas unfurling onto a powerful, structured yet polished palate, while overall it retains decent acidity to sustain the long finish. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 14.3%



Viña Chocalan, Origen Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2014 91 AC 92 PR 92 PT 89

N/A UK www.chocalanwines.com

Alluring and earthy nose, dried herb aromas leading to an elegant and savoury palate with an engrossing herbal and bay leaf expression. Needs a bit more time but is shaping up nicely. **Drink** 2017–2022 **Alc** 14.5%



Junta, Amigo Perro, Curicó Valley 2016 90 AC 92 PR 86 PT 91

N/A UK www.juntawinery.com

Pure and youthful, with floral, creamy fruit intermingling with notes of spice, pepper and graphite, and enlivened by refreshing acidity. It feels tight and angular, ready for grilled sausages. **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13%



Las Niñas, Reserva, Apalta, Colchagua Valley 2016 90 AC 89 PR 94 PT 88

POA *Vintage Roots*

With complex aromatics of dried fruit and baked herbs, this is an intriguing style majoring not on fruit but instead on a stony, herbal precision, bolstered by fine yet firm, savoury tannins. **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Matetic Vineyards, Corralillo, Apalta, Colchagua Valley 2014 90 AC 90 PR 90 PT 89

£16 Armit

Full, rich and heady – a full-throttle Carmeneré – with figgy, leather-imbued Christmas cake fruit alongside notes of sweet dark chocolate. High-octane and broad-shouldered but quite grounded with it. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14%



Arboleda, Aconcagua Valley 2015 90 AC 88 PR 90 PT 93

£15 Hatch Mansfield

Initially it's all about the oak, but rapidly the dark fruit arrives to conquer the nose and palate, accompanied by engaging notes of roasted herbs and lifted by juicy, refreshing acidity. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14%



Caliterra, Tributo, Colchagua Valley 2014 90 AC 89 PR 89 PT 91

£13.25 Bacchanalia, Haslemere Wine Merchants,

Kingsgate Wines, The Clifton Cellars, The Drink Shop A forceful style yet it has a strong sense of place, with a lifted and pretty nose of mint and herbs leading to a juicy, fruity yet at the same time earthy palate. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Canepa, Finísimo, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015 90 AC 88 PR 89 PT 92

N/A UK www.canepawines.cl

Delicate and elegant, juicy, bright raspberry and blackberry fruit raised up by firm yet nicely integrated tannins. Not super-complex, but engaging. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14%



MontGras, Reserva, Central Valley 2016 90 AC 90 PR 90 PT 90

£8.99 Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wines

Pronounced nose of sleek black fruit and black olive cedes to a bright and refreshing palate, with a dense core of black fruit embossed by subtle herbal, meaty elements. Cool, fluid and well-rounded. **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Odfjell, Orzada Organic, Maule Valley 2015 90 AC 92 PR 88 PT 90

£15.95–£17.90 Alliance, Drinkmonger

Voluptuous and engaging, in a riper style, with heady aromas leading to an excellent varietal expression of earthy, violet-tinged flavours, and firm tannins lifted by a welcome lick of acidity. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14.5%



San V, Chungará, Maule Valley 2015 90 AC 92 PR 89 PT 89

£20.38 Shawbury Vintners

In a style aiming for freshness over heft, with an inviting nose of damp earth and wild bramble fruit ushering in a wonderfully taut and tense palate of sleek blackberry and violet-toned fruit. **Drink** 2017–2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Château Los Boldos, Grande Reserve, Cachapoal Andes 2015 90 AC 89 PR 89 PT 92

£9.99 Liberty

A fairly lean style – racy and attractive – with herbal-infused plum aromas giving way to a palate brimming with liquorice-tinged red fruit. A refreshing, tense version of the variety. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.8%



Château Los Boldos, Tradition Reserve, Cachapoal Andes 2016 90 AC 89 PR 92 PT 89

£9.25 Exel, Liberty

A lighter-bodied style with lifted aromas of wild herbs and red berry fruit. Leads into a soft and light, yet long and refreshing palate. Crunchy, juicy and really engaging. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Concha y Toro, Serie Riberas Gran Reserva, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015 90 AC 89 PR 92 PT 89

N/A UK www.conchayatoro.com

An elegant nose with baked plum fruit embellished by notes of tobacco and dried flowers, while soft and rounded tannins adorn juicy flavours of spice-laden strawberry fruit. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 14%



Tierra del Fuego, Gran Reserva, Maule Valley 2015 90 AC 92 PR 90 PT 89

N/A UK www.tdf.cl

Understated and restrained, the cassis and herbal nose gives way to a finely structured palate, with grainy tannins sustaining plum fruit to a fresh menthol finish. An impressive food wine. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Viña Chocalan, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2014 90 AC 91 PR 90 PT 89

N/A UK www.chocalanwines.com

Dishes up a broad, aromatic display of dried flowers, herbs, cream and dried spices. Spicy and herbal in its flavours, balanced by sleek tannins and incisive acidity in support. It's full of warmth yet elegantly rendered. **Drink** 2017–2021 **Alc** 14%



Viña Marty, Pirca, Maule Valley 2015 90 AC 90 PR 92 PT 88

N/A UK www.vinamarty.cl

A very pretty and drinkable style that's long and satisfying, with herbal-invested dark fruit aromas unfolding onto lovely juicy, crunchy fruit on the palate, providing a beautiful marriage of freshness and succulence. **Drink** 2017–2020 **Alc** 14% ➤

Recommended 86–89pts

Wine	Score	AC	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
De Martino, Legado, Maipo Valley 2015	89	89	85	92	Earthy, gravelly nose leads to an intense and concentrated palate with a solid, firm structure of tannins and acidity, if perhaps a little austere.	13.5%	2017-2019	£11.30-£12.99	Exel, Jones of Brockley, L'Art du Vin, Les Caves de Pyrene,
Errazuriz, Estate Series, Aconcagua Valley 2015	89	87	86	93	A crystal-clear, pared-back example, brimming with soft and rounded flavours of herbs, spices and refreshing red fruit.	13.5%	2017-2019	£10.45	Amazon, Ellie's Cellar, Islington Wine, Majestic, Taurus, The Devine Wine Co
Haras de Pirque, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2016	89	88	86	92	Very youthful but promising nose. Tense and firm yet refreshing, lively palate of herb and clove-ingrained cherry fruit. Needs a bit of time to come together.	14%	2017-2019	£10.99	All About Wine, Berkmann
Junta, Reserve, Curicó Valley 2015	89	87	88	91	Vibrant and tense in character, with a lovely depth of spice-led red fruit together with savoury, meaty, animal notes. Intriguing and engaging.	13.5%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.juntawinery.com
Pérez Cruz, Limited Edition, Maipo Valley 2014	89	90	89	88	Streamlined and approachable, an elegant and creamy nose welcomes a soft and fairly plush palate, but with a sufficient firmness of tannin to support.	14%	2017-2018	£15.06-£18.99	Exel, Great Wines Direct, Hallgarten Druitt & Novum, Strictly Wine, Wineman
San Pedro, 1865 Selected Vineyard, Maule Valley 2015	89	91	88	87	Hedonistic, rich and full: plush, creamy nose leading to a voluptuous palate ferrying oodles of spice-drenched black fruit. An international style.	14.6%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.vspwinegroup.com
Santa Alicia, Reserva, Maipo Valley 2016	89	90	88	89	Fairly developed aromatics, with a satisfying fruit character in the mouth mobilised by lively acidity. An easy-drinking style with a delicate floral finish.	13.5%	2017-2019	£9.99	Amazon, Clyde Valley Wines, Harvey's Brewery, M&M Personal Vintners, Quantock Abbey Wine Cellars, Wine in Cornwall
Siegel, Single Vineyard, Colchagua Valley 2014	89	86	90	90	Youthful, tight and tense, with sleek and lithe dark fruit enriched by toasty, chary characters. Grippy and intriguing.	14%	2017-2020	£17.99	Carson Wines
Sutil, Canto de Piedra, Colchagua Valley 2013	89	86	93	88	Harmonious and easy-going yet with a mature, smoky, dried fruit and tobacco complexity. Long, resonant and crying out for food.	13.5%	2017-2019	£11.99	Castelnu Wine Agencies
Undurraga, TH Cauquenes, Maule Valley 2015	89	89	90	88	A riper, pleasant style, with glossy aromas, a juicy and succulent palate, warming dark fruit core and young, grainy tannins; to be drunk with meat.	14.5%	2017-2020	POA	Eurowines
Ventisquero, Root 1, Colchagua Valley 2015	89	88	92	87	A pretty nose of violet and floral fruit. Warm, unctuous, smooth-textured palate of chocolate-coated blueberry fruit, kept refreshing by lively acidity.	13.5%	2017-2019	£8	Morrison, North South Wines
Alto Roble, Patagón Grand Reserve, Maule Valley 2015	88	88	86	90	Herbal and brambled nose unearths a textured palate of decent typicity, with herbal and spice notes supporting creamy dark fruit. Elegant and profound.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.survalles.com
Caliterra, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015	88	87	88	88	Full, rich and structured, with warm plummy fruit intertwined with notes of baked herbs and leather, illuminated by a welcome shard of fresh acidity.	14%	2017-2020	£11	Cairns & Hickey, Cheers, The Clifton Cellars, The Devine Wine Co, Wine Rack
Emiliana, Adobe, Colchagua Valley 2016	88	90	87	88	Well-boned and tightly structured, with expressive red fruit heightened by complex notes of leather, roasted herbs and smoke. A decent expression.	13.4%	2017-2019	£8.99	Blas Ar Fwyd, Boutinot, Hoult, The Oxford Wine Co, Wine Utopia, WoodWinters
Falernia, Pedrisal Single Vineyard Reserva, Elqui 2014	88	87	88	88	Christmas cake nose surcharged with thyme and morello cherry. High-toned palate of strawberry with oak-derived spice, on the sweet side yet satisfying.	15%	2017-2019	POA	Enotria&Coe
Hugo Casanova, Reserve Collection, Maule Valley 2015	88	89	88	87	Easy-going style: herbal-inspired nose, soft palate of cherry and strawberry fruit embellished by mineral and herbal notes. Refreshing, linear, engaging.	13.5%	2017-2019	£10.99	Le Bon Vin
Miguel Torres, Cordillera, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2012	88	90	87	87	Enticing nose of cassis and mulberry, with a hint of balsamic. Full, ripe style, green herbal tones underpinned by gentle red fruit; in full maturity right now.	14%	2017-2018	£15.99	Dylans, Hoult, Mumbles Fine Wines, Polygon, R Campbell & Sons, Roberts & Speight, The Dram Shop, The Grape to Glass
Santa Ema, Amplius One, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015	88	89	87	88	Ambitious and high-toned, with a weighty nose of leathery spice ceding to a dense yet slick palate where oak meets dark fig and prune fruit. A lot of wine!	14%	2017-2019	£15.42-£19.99	Exel, Inverarity Morton
Santa Rita, Pehuén, Apalta, Colchagua Valley 2013	88	89	89	87	Plush, floral aromas then warming flavours of dried fruit and sweet spices, herbal hints. Engaging, not just about sweetness, though perhaps a little hot.	14.5%	2017-2020	£30	www.santarita.com
Terra Noble, Costa, Colchagua Valley 2014	88	85	88	92	Complex herbal, minty, floral and graphite aromas. Dense and spicy in the mouth, this is food-friendly, fresh and gently bittersweet.	14%	2017-2021	POA	Vintage Cellars
Ventisquero, Grey, Maipo Valley 2014	88	89	88	88	Polished and broad-structured, with creamy dark fruit raised up by firm tannins. Perhaps not the most elegant, but energetic and expressive.	14%	2017-2020	£14.99	Derventio Wines, Slurp, The Wine Centre
Viña Maipo, Grand Devoción, Maule Valley 2015	88	87	89	87	A deep, dark and brooding style, with lavish creamy oak aromas leading to a weighty, oak-driven palate saved by a natural lift of freshness.	14.5%	2017-2020	N/A UK	www.vinamaipo.com
Viña San Esteban, In Situ Reserva, Aconcagua 2016	88	88	87	90	A fruit-driven, lighter style, dark fruit aromas introducing a juicy, rounded palate, propelled by lively acidity and gentle tannins through to the finish.	13.5%	2017-2019	£10.50	Widely available via UK agent Delibo
Antiyal, Maipo Valley 2014	87	88	87	86	Restrained aromas of red berry fruit with polished herbal-edged flavours, in a fairly extracted style yet with decent varietal character, if a tad short.	14.5%	2017-2020	POA	Vintage Roots
Araucano, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2016	87	87	87	86	A soft, pleasant and quaffable style, with minty, herbal black fruit aromas and flavours and some sweetness of fruit. Decent for its style.	13.5%	2017-2019	£9.70	Georges Barbier
Carmen, Winemaker's Reserve Black, Apalta, Colchagua 2013	87	89	87	86	A winter warmer in style, with spice-laden prune and fig aromas ceding to a sweet and brooding palate, and an oak-toned dark chocolate finish.	14%	2017-2019	£19.99	Ocado
CyT, Marqués de Casa Concha, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015	87	88	86	87	Full and rich, yet restrained and approachable, with sweet and sleek dark berry fruit accompanied by notes of roasted coffee, herbs and dried flowers.	14%	2017-2020	£12.99	The Drink Shop, Uvinum
Errazuriz, Aconcagua Alto, Aconcagua Valley 2015	87	86	86	89	With an easy-going appeal, polished blackberry aromas lead to a juicy palate rich in black fruit, tempered by firm acidity on the finish.	14%	2017-2019	£18-£21.70	Cheers, Dulwich Vintners, Penistone Court Wine Cellars
Errazuriz, Max Reserva, Aconcagua Valley 2015	87	87	84	89	Straightforward, frank nose of creamy dark fruit. Lively and attractive with pleasant juicy fruit – almost a 'vin de soif' but with structure.	14%	2017-2019	£13-£16.05	Amazon, Dulwich Vintners, Ellie's Cellar, Vino Wines
Falernia, Gran Reserva, Elqui Valley 2015	87	88	87	85	Youthful and tense but promising, with food needed to tame firm, drying tannins and dark, resinous, treacly fruit. Fine, if not super-varietal.	15%	2017-2018	POA	Enotria&Coe, Great Western Wines
Junta, Grand Reserve, Curicó Valley 2015	87	88	85	89	Alluring aromas of tobacco, cream, baked plum unfold onto a soft palate of leather and liquorice-infused red fruit, underpinned by well-managed tannins.	14%	2017-2020	N/A UK	www.juntawinery.com

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	AC	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Koyle, Royale, Colchagua Valley 2014	87	84	87	90	Smoky, toasty, dark fruit aromas lead to refreshing red cherry and sweet-spice flavours – attractive and easy-going, if a little short.	14.5%	2017-2019	£19.95-£24.50	Corks Out, Ocado
Santa Rita, 120 Reserva Especial, Central Valley 2016	87	89	86	86	Enchanting and intriguing, with pretty floral aromas then a spicy, angular palate with bright acidity yet a creamy breadth of savoury dark fruit.	13%	2017-2018	£7.99	Majestic
Terra Noble, Andes, Colchagua Valley 2014	87	85	87	88	Menthol and wild, bramble fruit aromas. Rounded, succulent palate with oak-derived overtones of vanilla and wood-powder accompanying rich dark fruit.	14%	2018-2020	POA	Vintage Cellars
Terra Noble, Gran Reserva, Maule Valley 2014	87	86	86	88	Full to the brim with spiced, baked black fruit, this is the clearest example of a warm-climate red – firm-textured, and a touch drying.	14%	2017-2019	POA	Vintage Cellars
Undurraga, TH Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015	87	88	85	89	A substantial nose, with leather and toasty aromas. Big and broad on the palate, with a thick layer of spicy black fruit – fairly demanding in style.	14%	2017-2020	£19.50	Eurowines
Viña La Rosa, Cornellana Reserva, Cachapoal Valley 2015	87	88	85	88	Easy and approachable, with hedgerow and bramble aromas leading to herbal-toned red fruit flavours, widened by a decent lick of acidity.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.larosa.cl
Viña La Rosa, La Palma, Cachapoal Valley 2016	87	87	86	88	Big and weighty yet mellow in its attack, with dark prune and tobacco aromas yielding to a broad and warming palate with soft, tamed tannins.	13%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.larosa.cl
Viña La Rosa, La Rosa, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2013	87	87	89	86	Soft, rounded and accessible, this has matured nicely with elegant flavours of dried herbs, tobacco and a satisfying warmth of fruit. A wine for food.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.larosa.cl
Viña Requiñua, Toro de Piedra Gran Reserva, Maule 2015	87	88	86	88	Pronounced nose of sleek black fruit, dense and chewy palate with firm tannins encircling strawberry and cherry fruit, with cinnamon and clove notes.	14%	2017-2020	£13.95	Condor Wines, The Oxford Wine Co
Carmen, Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	85	85	87	Jammy and pippy on the nose, with a deep and extracted palate of macerated cherries. Mellow and sweetly fruited, a crowd-pleasing style.	14.2%	2017-2020	£11.99	Ocado
Casa Silva, Doña Dominga Gran Reserva, Colchagua 2016	86	85	87	87	An attractive herbal aspect here with decent underlying juicy berry fruit, though the smoky oak tones still need time to integrate. A food wine.	14.5%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.casasilva.cl
Casa Silva, Pintao Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2016	86	86	86	87	Straightforward and accessible, a fairly lean palate displaying a satisfying coolness of herbal dark fruit. The oak needs a bit more time to integrate.	14.5%	2017-2019	POA	Kingsland Drinks
Concha y Toro, Terrunyo, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2015	86	87	84	88	Attractive aromas of raspberry and sweet spice welcome a creamy-textured, polished palate, with red fruit infiltrated by cedary oak and herbal traits.	14.5%	2017-2020	£22.99	Frazier's, Tesco, The Drink Shop
Echeverría, Gran Reserva, Curicó Valley 2014	86	86	93	78	Intriguing floral and gunflint aromas lead to evolved, savoury and smoky flavours with a pleasing old-school depth of fruit. Crying out for charcuterie.	13.5%	2017-2018	£10.99-£11.49	Corking Wines, Great Wines Direct, Hallgarten Druitt & Novum, Strictly Wine, Winedirect, Wineman
Emiliana, Novas, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	83	86	89	Dominated by minty dark chocolate notes and firm tannins but refreshed by a mellow acidity, this is nicely done and invites food – a barbecue red.	14.5%	2017-2019	£10.99	Blanco & Gomez, Boutinot, Harrods, ND John, Tanners, Wines of Interest
Estampa, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	86	86	87	Dark fruits, herbs and red pepper on the nose. Very intense palate with an alluring texture of leafy dark fruit enriched by oak and graphite elements.	14%	2017-2019	£14.99-£17.99	Fine & Rare, Simply Wines Direct
Hugo Casanova, Antaño Reserva, Curicó Valley 2015	86	86	85	86	Sweetly fruited and mellow while fairly broad in the mouth, with a tinned strawberry character ferried by gritty, grainy tannins.	13.5%	2017-2019	£8.99	Le Bon Vin, Smokehouse Wines
Koyle, Cerro Basalto Cuartel G2, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	84	88	85	Inviting, creamy dark fruit aromas with a spicy, juicy, bittersweet palate profile. A commercial approach, of a decent expression and energy.	14%	2017-2019	£15.50	The Wine Society
Misiones de Rengo, Gran Reserva Cuvée, Rapel 2015	86	84	87	87	Tense yet at the same time ripe and voluptuous: a slick commercial style with toasty dark fruit and an accent on the spices.	14%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.vspwinegroup.com
Montevista, Maule Valley 2016	86	90	82	86	Fresh aromas of violet and rose-petal usher in a youthful, fruit-driven palate with bright cherry fruit, zippy acidity and soft tannins: lightweight and pure.	13.5%	2017-2018	£7.99	Boutinot
MontGras, De Gras Reserva, Central Valley 2016	86	85	86	87	Restrained, leathery and dark fruit aromas lead to a concise yet harmonious palate, with easy-going, herbal-toned cherry flavours and a nip of firm tannin.	13.5%	2017-2018	£8.99	Enotria&Coe
Puntí Ferrer, Gran Reserva, Rapel Valley 2015	86	85	88	86	A juicy, elegant and refreshing style, with cherry and blackberry fruit seasoned by savoury and toasty oak elements. Nicely rendered.	13.5%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.puntiferrer.cl
Santa Carolina, Reserva de Familia, Rapel Valley 2013	86	84	88	86	Dark, brooding and intense, baked plummy fruit encased in a creamy texture, punctuated by substantial tannins on the finish. To be drunk with meat.	14.5%	2017-2018	POA	Ehrmanns
Santa Ema, Select Terroir Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2016	86	86	86	86	A lighter style that slips down easily, with creamy red and black fruit joined by hints of herbs and cinnamon spice. Decent in this context.	13.5%	2017-2018	POA	Inverarity Morton
Santa Helena, Selección del Directorio Gran Res, Rapel 2015	86	85	84	89	Concentrated and muscular yet slick and succulent, showing polished dark fruit animated by pronounced smoky tones.	14.8%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.vspwinegroup.com
Santa Helena, Siglo de Oro, Central Valley 2016	86	86	85	88	Straightforward, easy-going and enjoyable, with minty, plummy aromas ceding to a soft and rounded palate with warm fruit and pretty floral notes.	13%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.vspwinegroup.com
Santa Rita, Medalla Real, Colchagua Valley 2014	86	85	88	84	A foodie, oak-driven example rich in smoky notes, along with cassis and creamy, floral-edged dark fruit. Easy to appreciate, if perhaps a little forced.	14.2%	2017-2019	N/A UK	www.santarita.com
Santa Rita, Reserva, Rapel Valley 2016	86	86	85	87	Youthful and primary, with still slightly raw tannins yet full of expressive herbal-toned strawberry aromas and flavours, though perhaps a bit 'made'.	13%	2017-2019	£11.99	Majestic
Siegel, Special Reserve, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	85	87	86	Leathery fruit cake aromas unfold onto a big palate, rounded tannins under blueberry and dark cherry fruit, permeated by an oak-derived sweet spice.	14%	2017-2019	£10.99	Carson Wines
Sutil, Aluvios de Tingui Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2014	86	80	88	90	Rich in barnyard and leathery notes, this is a wild, animal version of the grape, beefed up by tense tannins.	13%	2017-2019	£13.50	Castelnu Wine Agencies
Sutil, Puntal, Central Valley 2013	86	88	83	86	Pretty nose combining dark fruit with an attractive floral kick. In the mouth, a dense core of minty black fruit and bright acidity lifts to a zippy, fresh finish.	13.5%	2017-2018	£8.99	Castelnu Wine Agencies

Recommended (continued) 86–89pts

Wine	Score	AC	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Undurraga, Founder's Collection, Colchagua 2015	86	86	86	86	Rich, glossy, extracted style, with dark and dense violet-tinged compote fruit and notes of roasted herbs. A little 'OTT' perhaps, but a style some will love.	14%	2017-2018	POA	Eurowines
Viña La Rosa, La Capitana, Cachapoal Valley 2015	86	88	82	87	Tamed, tender and a touch resinous, with floral-tinged hedgerow and forest fruit underpinned by decent acidity, if a little short on the finish.	14%	2017-2018	N/A UK	www.larosa.cl
Viu Manent, Secret, Colchagua Valley 2015	86	84	86	87	A juicy, fruit-forward style, with tangy blackberry fruit accompanied by floral and spicy touches, if a little lightweight on the finish.	14%	2017-2019	£11.99	Bon Coeur, Oddbins, Whole Foods Market
Zapallar, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2016	86	86	85	86	Still very youthful aromatically but easy to enjoy, this is focused on Carmeneré's green, herbal side, with a layer of red fruit in the background.	13.5%	2017-2018	£9.95	Davy's

Commended 83-85pts

■ **Carmen, 1850 Premier Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2016 85**, 13%, 2017-2019, N/A UK www.carmen.com
 ■ **Casa Silva, Microterroir, Colchagua Valley 2011 85**, 14.5%, 2017-2018, POA Jackson Nugent Vintners
 ■ **Casa Silva, Reserva Cuvée Colchagua, Colchagua Valley 2016 85**, 14.5%, 2017-2019, POA Jackson Nugent Vintners
 ■ **Irene Morales, Grand Reserve, Maule Valley 2014 85**, 14%, 2017-2019, £8.99 AC Gallie
 ■ **Montes, Purple Angel, Colchagua Valley 2014 85**, 14.5%, 2017-2018, £38.99 Amazon, Just in Cases, Liberty, Majestic
 ■ **Odfjell, Armador Organic, Central Valley 2016 85**, 13%, 2017-2019, £9.95-£10.90 Alliance, Cambridge Wine Merchants, Drinkmonger
 ■ **Primus, Colchagua Valley 2014 85**, 14%, 2017-2019, £11.95-£14.99 CellarVie, The Wine Society
 ■ **Siegel, Crucero Collection, Colchagua Valley 2015 85**, 13.5%, 2017-2018, £8.49 Carson Wines
 ■ **Undurraga, Sibaris, Colchagua Valley 2015 85**, 14%, 2017-2018, £11.75 Eurowines
 ■ **Ventisquero, Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015 85**, 13%, 2017-2019, £8.88-£9.99 Buy Great Wine, The Wine Centre
 ■ **Araucano, Alka, Colchagua Valley 2015 84**, 15%, 2017-2018, £35 Georges Barbier
 ■ **Calcu, Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2013 84**, 13.5%, 2017-2018, £15.75 Askew Wine, Vinothentic
 ■ **Casas del Bosque, Reserva, Rapel Valley 2015 84**, 14.5%, 2017-2018, £11.99-£12.99 Widely available via UK importer

■ **ABS Wine Agencies, J Bouchon, Block Series Reserva Especial, Maule Valley 2014 84**, 14%, 2017-2018, £15.75 Bancroft, Dunells, Jaded Palates, Neils Dubro, Quaff
 ■ **Koyle, Gran Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015 84**, 14%, 2017-2018, £16.95 (2013) Berry Bros & Rudd
 ■ **Lapostolle, Cuvée Alexandre, Colchagua Valley 2015 84**, 14.5%, 2017-2018, £16.99 Fareham Wine Cellar, Winedirect
 ■ **Santa Ema, Reserva, Cachapoal Valley 2015 84**, 14%, 2017-2018, £13.99 Inverarity Morton
 ■ **Undurraga, U, Central Valley 2016 84**, 13.5%, 2017-2018, £8.25 Eurowines
 ■ **William Cole, Columbine Special, Colchagua Valley 2016 84**, 14%, 2018-2019, N/A UK www.williamcolevineyards.cl
 ■ **Emiliana, Natura, Colchagua Valley 2016 83**, 13.4%, 2017-2018, £8.75 Boutinot, Oddbins
 ■ **Emiliana, Signos de Origen, Colchagua Valley 2015 83**, 14.7%, 2017, £15.99 Ann et Vin, Boutinot, Caviste, Grape & Grind, WoodWinters
 ■ **Los Vascos, Grande Reserva, Colchagua Valley 2015 83**, 14%, 2017-2018, £18.50 Waddesdon Wine
 ■ **Luis Felipe Edwards, Casa Felipe, Central Valley 2015 83**, 13%, 2017-2019, £7.75 Corney & Barrow
 ■ **Miguel Torres, Santa Digna, Central Valley 2015 83**, 13.5%, 2017-2018, £10.99 Gwin Llyn Wines, Hailsham Cellars, Latitude Wine, Mitchells Vintners, Pallant of Arundel, The Dram Shop, The Lovely Little Wine Shop
 ■ **Veramonte, Colchagua Valley 2015 83**, 14.5%, 2017-2018, £10.99 Ocado

Fair 76-82pts

■ **Cousiño Macul, Central Valley 2015 82** ■ **Montes, Alpha, Colchagua Valley 2014 82** ■ **Santa Carolina, Herencia, Peumo 2010 82** ■ **Valle Secreto, First Edition, Cachapoal Valley 2015 82** ■ **Viña I Wines, I Latina, Peumo, Cachapoal Valley 2014 82** ■ **Viu Manent, El Incidente, Colchagua Valley 2011 82**
 ■ **Errazuriz, Kai, Aconcagua Valley 2014 81**
 ■ **Viña Santa Cruz, Chamán Gran Reserva, Colchagua Costa 2015 81** ■ **Casa Silva, Gran Terroir, Colchagua Valley 2015 76** ■ **Viña von Siebenthal, Gran Reserva, Aconcagua Valley 2014 76**

Poor 70-75pts

■ **Lapostolle, Grand Selection, Rapel Valley 2013 73**

Next month's panel tastings

Brunello di Montalcino & Spanish Atlantic reds

My top three

Alistair Cooper

■ **William Fèvre Chile, La Misión Reserva Especial, Maipo Valley 2015**

What stood out here was the brilliant addition of Cabernet Franc, which helps to give an elegant and floral expression of Carmeneré. Brightness, fine-grained tannins: fantastic! **95 Drink** 2017-2020

■ **Cremaschi Furlotti, Loncomilla, Maule Valley 2015** A winery that continues to impress. Muscular style with firm, beautifully structured tannins, and it has the signature Maule freshness and vibrancy. **95 Drink** 2017-2021

■ **Casa Donoso, Bicentenario, Maule Valley 2015** Superb, refreshing, subtle style with delicate aromatics. The key is the acidity, freshness and tension which can be hard to get right with Carmeneré. Bang on. **94 Drink** 2017-2019

My top three

Peter Richards MW

■ **William Fèvre Chile, La Misión Gran Reserva, Maipo Valley 2013**

Grown at altitude and made with real restraint, Fèvre's Carmenerés tend to be elegant and food-friendly. This one's super classy: savoury and linear, with delicious maturity. **97 Drink** 2017-2021

■ **Las Niñas, Reserva, Apalta, Colchagua Valley 2016** This elegant, insistent style defies the stereotypes. Apalta is usually all about big, rich wines, but this is a study in delicacy, inviting contemplation of the earth, such is its mineral power. **94 Drink** 2017-2019

■ **Echeverría, Gran Reserva, Curicó Valley 2014** My fellow tasters didn't rate this edgy, tangy, smoky style as much as me – but I couldn't bear to see it lost in the mix. **93 Drink** 2017-2018

My top three

Patricio Tapia

■ **Cremaschi Furlotti, Loncomilla, Maule Valley 2015** With its granite soils and generous sun, Loncomilla is one of Chile's best sources for Carmeneré. A good example, this has flavours and aromas of black fruits and delicious notes of herbs and spices. **96 Drink** 2017-2021

■ **Casa Donoso, Sucesor, Maule Valley 2013** From a dry-farmed vineyard in Loncomilla, this is blended with 15% Malbec. Voluptuous flavours of ripe fruits, and enough nervy acidity to give balance. **96 Drink** 2017-2019

■ **Ventisquero, Queulat, Maipo Valley 2015** Towards the coastal zone of the Maipo, in Trinidad vineyard, the influence of the Pacific produces reds that are fresh and alive. This is a good example: strong, firm acidity, notes of vibrant red fruits and a medium but tight and tense body. **95 Drink** 2018-2021

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