



Chile's geography is amongst the most spectacular in the world. Its wines are fast catching up to the scenery. Above: Arboleda's vineyards in the Aconcagua Valley.

A Chilean Wine Primer

The 'Global Financial Crisis' has not stopped people from enjoying wine, but it has made many people more price-sensitive. Reports from retailers, restaurateurs and industry analysts indicate that consumers are buying as much wine as they did a year ago, though they're spending much less. Naturally, the big beneficiaries are those that can offer outstanding wines at bargain prices. Chile is one of these.

The last five or six vintages have been very good, with many believing that the 2007 vintage reds will surpass the exceptional 2005 and 2003 vintages in quality. As challenging as this might make things for Australian and New Zealand producers, it presents an opportunity for Chilean wines to move up the scale in price and prestige, and enter the middle segment of the market, at least so long as Chile's winemakers can resist the temptation to return to the 'bargain basement'. With land and labour costs still far below those of 'premier' regions like Bordeaux or the Barossa, Chilean winemakers have known for some time that if they can focus on quality, they can over-deliver at almost any price point.

The perception of Chile as a producer solely of inexpensive but pleasant, value for money wines has been difficult to shrug off. It was abruptly skewed with the release of Eduardo Chadwick's 'Sena' in 1995. Such truly great (and expensive AU\$100+) offerings have now placed the country firmly in the company of the best wines in the world (see below for details), despite having little track record in comparison to Europe's greatest estates.

Now the vast gap between inexpensive 'quaffers' and 'icon' wines is gradually being filled, with the emergence of unique, engaging, mid-priced wines from Chile. While these wines may not be prestigious enough to woo collectors and high rollers, they will certainly appeal to bargain-hunters. Quite simply, for those desiring wines with more interest and complexity than the 'cheap and cheerful', you can now look to Chile for \$20 wines that taste like \$40. Last year we tested the waters with a trial shipment from Chadwick's Vina Sena (including Arboleda and Caliterra vineyards) based in Aconcagua, and Domaine Lafite Rothschild's 'Los Vascos' operation in Colchagua. The shipment was an instant success, and introduced Australian wine lovers to what we described as Chile's New World vision of pre-phylloxera France. The grape variety, Carmenere, is the sixth member of the Cabernet Sauvignon family, and one of Chile's signature red varieties, once common in Bordeaux, particularly in the Medoc but now rarely found in France.

Due to the relatively small quantities involved, many winelovers missed out on a chance to try these wines. Several months ago, we received forward samples of new releases from Chile and the stand outs, (which concentrate on more mid-priced reds from the outstanding 2007 vintage) were selected for shipment to Australia in a refrigerated container, due to arrive in September 2009.

In the following pages, we profile these producers, as well as the historical development, terroir, and present challenges facing the Chilean wine industry. We trust you will find this concise introduction stimulates your interest in what is one of the most exciting new wine regions in the world.

The Historical Development of Chile's Wine Industry

Many Australian wine lovers will be unfamiliar with South American wines, yet the continent actually has a longer tradition of wine production than our own.

Where 16th century attempts by Spanish Conquistadors failed, primarily because of the north's tropical climate, a quarter of a century later, Hernan Cortes managed to grow vines in the Mexican highlands from European cuttings (or more likely seeds). It was here that the America's first successful vintage was produced. The Spanish missionaries who arrived in the New World with the Conquistadors and explorers encouraged viticulture because wine had an essential role in the sacrament of the Eucharist, and as Spanish settlers spread, so viticulture slowly migrated south.

When Bartolome de Terrazas, a lieutenant of the Spanish explorer, Francisco Pizarro, bought vines to Peru in 1548, the first Chilean vines were also being planted. Small quantities of wine were been produced around Santiago by 1550 using 'rustic' varieties that probably no longer exist, although specific grape varieties mentioned by the 16th Century Jesuit priest and Chilean historian, Alonso Ovalle, include Muscatel, Torontel, Albilho, Mollar and "...the common black grape." * (1)



Pedro Lira's 1889 painting of the founding of Santiago by Conquistadors. As the Spanish conquered the land they and the missionaries that followed, brought grapevines with them.

Spanish rule over the Chilean territories restricted wine production with the stipulation that Chileans should purchase the bulk of their wines directly from Spain itself. In 1641, wine imports from Chile and the Vice-royalty of Peru into Spain were banned, severely damaging the wine industry in the colony (the huge surplus of grapes was subsequently made into Pisco, a regional white spirit). For the most part the Chileans ignored these restrictions, preferring their domestic production to the oxidized and vinegary wines that didn't fare well during the long voyages from Spain. And as the 'forced' regress into **Pisco** production in Peru all but eliminated local wine production there, it was not long before Chilean wines were being exported, in bold competition against the imported wines of Spain.

Some early vineyards, particularly south of Santiago, were ransacked as a result of a prolonged war with the native 'Mapuche' peoples, however, the areas around Santiago were uninterrupted (in fact, they've remained in continuous wine production for over four centuries).

During the 18th Century, coinciding with the rise of more efficient irrigation techniques, viticultural development in Chile's central regions (between Santiago &



Francisco Pizarro (c. 1475 - 1541)



Hernan Cortes (1485 - 1547)

Pisco: Chile's National Spirit.

Pisco is a distillate of Chilean grape varieties, mainly of the Moscatel family, grown primarily in the semi-arid "little North" zone of Chile. Chile claims Pisco as its own, protecting its quality through strict adherence to production regulations. Pisco can be enjoyed by itself, on the rocks, with lemon or fruit juice or with your favourite cocktail.

Buy Pisco online at www.nicks.com.au



Chillan) became more readily viable. The dominant grape varieties were Pais [pronounced "pah-EES"] and Alexandra Muscatel which were made into sweet wines, whereby they were often boiled, concentrating the grape must. Following his shipwreck off the coast at Cape Horn, Admiral John Byron (Grandfather of the poet Lord Byron) travelled across Chile and came back to England with a glowing review of Chilean Muscatel comparing it favourably to Madeira.

Then something of a wine renaissance took place in Chile. It was the result of 19th century viticultural pioneers (mainly well travelled, wealthy industrialists) inspired by the vineyards of France, in particular Bordeaux. Fortuitously, for both the past and present Chilean industry, the Government of the time had previously been persuaded to establish the 'Quinta Normal' - an experimental nursery for all manner of exotic botanical species, including more than 40,000 vines and 70 different varieties, many of them European. The project was the brain child of an enterprising French naturalist and scientist, Claudio Gay. It meant that "...Chile had its own collection of *vinifera* cuttings safely banked in viticultural isolation before the onset of the world's late 19th century scourges of powdery mildew and *phylloxera*." (2)

The first of these cuttings formed the foundation of the modern industry, and were planted in the Caneten Valley of Colchagua in 1859. (Silvestre Ochagavia is generally credited with being the first to introduce French varieties for commercial purposes in the Maipo Valley). Their introduction proved to be timely. While phylloxera devastated Europe, Chile's vineyards were rapidly expanding due to the sudden demand for 'Bordeaux-style' wines in Europe where Chilean wine was first exported in 1877. At the same time, a class of 'gentlemen farmers' was emerging, some who had made significant fortunes on the country's abundant mineral deposits, and who considered owning a vineyard on the outskirts of Santiago as something of a status symbol, particularly if it were being managed by a refugee French vigneron displaced by the effects of phylloxera.

Just as Europe's great vineyards were being systematically uprooted, Chile was boasting one of the only profitable, disease free wine industries in the world. In 1870, 9,000 hectares were under vine, and by 1900 this figure reached 40,000 hectares. It's not surprising that some of Chile's best-known wine names date from this period: Concha y Toro, Errazuriz, Santa Rita, Cousiño Macul, Undurraga and La Rosa, to name but a few, each offering a heritage to rival many of Europe's finest estates. It was an incredibly prosperous time, and by 1947, the wine industry had undergone a period of reorganisation and rationalization. New infrastructure was established with land being cleared for planting and water supply systems put in place.

Yet, in the years that followed, the Chilean wine industry started showing signs of recession - partly due to political, geographic and economic reasons - increased taxation on wine for example, meant domestic demand declined as did wine prices. Combined with decades of under-investment and lack of technological innovation, many Chilean wineries were left with no alternative but to grub vines. Throughout the 1970's and '80's, about half of Chile's vineyards, many located on excellent sites, were uprooted.

The brake on progress continued to take its toll until a return to democracy and free trade stimulated vigneron to regroup and lobby for change. However, the re-invigoration of the wine industry was to be led from unexpected quarters - namely, the famous Spanish vigneron, Miguel Torres. His model investment blazed a trail that others were to follow en masse. Old native oak casks were replaced by stainless steel tanks and by quality French and American oak barrels; while investors from the USA, Spain and France looking to establish a presence in what was clearly a unique location, followed Torres' lead, modernising wineries and viticultural practices.

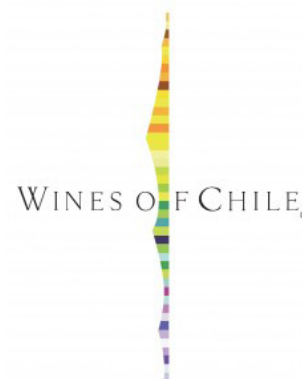
Chile's diverse viticultural terroirs combined with world class winemaking talents soon saw the country offering wines that were astounding critics worldwide. The global reaction to this dramatic increase in quality was testified to by the rise of exports: From an average of \$15 million dollars worth of wine annually in the 1990's to nearly \$600 million in 2001. (3)

The industry now represents a united front (see <http://www.winesofchile.org>), boosted by government support, as would be expected from a country presently exporting the equivalent of 4 out of every 5 bottles of wine produced. (4) Chile has become the largest exporter of wine pro rata of any major wine producing country today, while Chileans themselves are finally waking up to the vastly improved quality of their own wines.

* presumably he was referring to 'Pais', identical to the 'Mission' grape of California. It's believed the Pais grape of Chile is a descendant of the Negra Corriente or Monica grape originally brought over to the new world by the Spanish. In southern Chile it's also referred to as Negra Peruana.



Claudio Gay (1800-1873), French illustrator and naturalist and one of the chief catalysts of the modern Chilean wine industry.



<http://www.winesofchile.org/> founded in 2002, W.O.C. is a promotional body that represents Chilean wineries with offices in Santiago and London.



Miguel Torres.

Chile's Unique Terroir & Recent Viticultural Progress

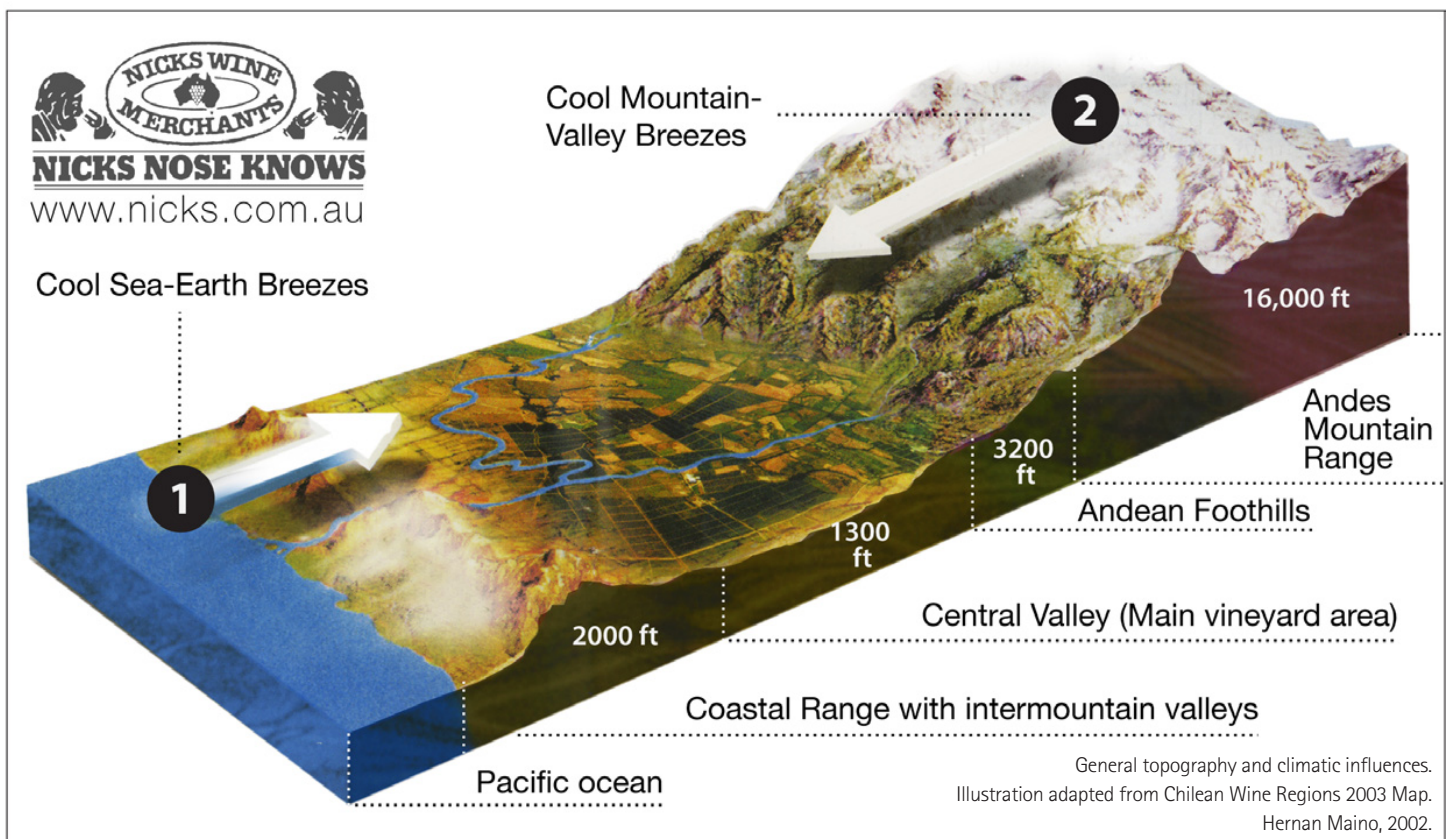
For those who don't know South America's geography, Chile must rank as one of the most peculiarly shaped countries in the world. It's a long, narrow north-south stretching sliver of spectacular landscapes, guarded by the magnificent Andes Mountain Range to the west and the wild Pacific ocean to the east. Between the central valleys and the ocean lies a smaller, coastal mountain range. The key climatic influence throughout is the icy Pacific, cooled by what's referred to as 'The Humboldt Current' [see illustration on right] which brings cold water from the southern oceans. Where there are breaks in the coastal range, cool air makes its way into the central valleys, moderating temperatures.

The important viticultural regions are concentrated in the centre of Chile between the parallels 27° 30' and 38° 30' S, a series of valleys spanning around 1200 km (750 miles). There are a variety of micro climates, some more suited to premium grape production than others.

The hot northerly sites around Atacama and Coquimbo produce table grapes and specialise in production of Chile's national spirit, 'Pisco'. It's further south that the traditional centre for premium grape growing can be found, within a 1000 km plateau known as the Central Valley. It's wines from this region that justifiably established Chile's present reputation as a producer of easy drinking, value for money wines. Here the climate is 'Mediterranean' (think of coastal California, South Africa and southwestern Australia) with warm summers tempered by sea breezes. Unbroken sunshine, little rain except perhaps towards the very end of harvest, and low atmospheric humidity, present ideal conditions for disease free, premium grape growing (here bio-dynamic farming is the rule rather than the exception). A criss cross of river systems carry melted snow during the growing season from the Andes to the Pacific, guaranteeing irrigation for the next summer's vintage. Thus, unlike Australia, the core of the Chilean wine industry is more-or-less drought proof.



A = Humboldt Current. B = Current from the East Drift
C = Cape Horn Current D = Polar Current



General topography and climatic influences.
Illustration adapted from Chilean Wine Regions 2003 Map.
Hernan Maino, 2002.

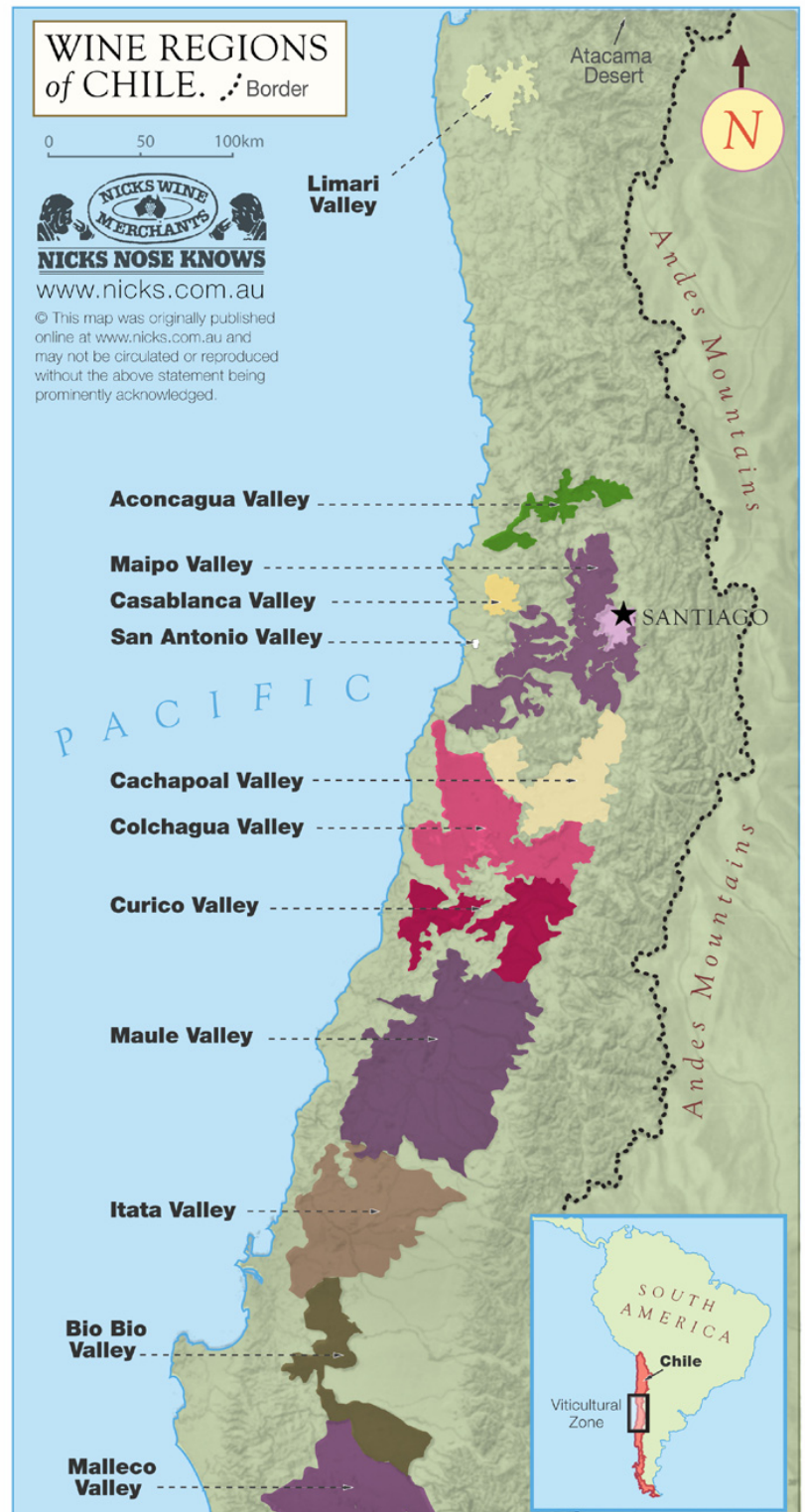
When Jancis Robinson published her second edition of *The Oxford Companion to Wine* in 1999, several of Chile's most exciting new wine regions (e.g. San Antonio, Colchagua, Leyda and the Limari Valley) were not even identified on the map nor mentioned in the text. It's testimony to just how fast Chile's wine scene is transforming. In 2009, U.K. wine writer, Chris Losh spent a week west of the Andes with some of the UK's finest sommeliers to explore the country's diversity. He was stunned at the rate of development since his last visit in 2002. *"Go back just six years and Chile was a country that, viticulturally speaking, hadn't changed all that much in the previous hundred years. Sure, grape growing techniques were better, and there was less País and a lot more Cabernet, but in terms of what was planted and, crucially, where it was planted (bar the emergence of the Casablanca Valley), it was a set-up that would probably have been familiar to anyone involved in the industry at the turn of the 20th century. To say there have been big developments in the past 10 years is to understate the case by a factor of about 20. This is an industry that has not so much evolved as changed out of all recognition".* (5)

In conjunction with demarcating the massive Central Valley into more concise micro-regions, Chile's major project is the ongoing identification of sites previously thought to be too cold for viticulture, including Casablanca, San Antonio, Leyda, Limari and Bio Bio. Until several years ago, the southern valleys such as Maule and Bio Bio, for example, remained un-developed, mainly producing undistinguished bulk wines from País. (The further south one gets, the cooler and wetter the climate is). Yet it is in these marginal regions that some of the most exciting developments are taking place. In Bordeaux-like conditions, the potential to make more expressive, elegant wines from a broad repertoire of European grape varieties is being realised.

While neighbouring Argentina continues to focus its efforts (almost exclusively) on Malbec, Chile is taking the opposite approach branching out with aromatic varieties like Sauvignon Blanc and Gewurztraminer that are delivering some excellent results in cooler climates. Hard work with both clone and site selection is already paying dividends; Sauvignon Blanc is hardly new to Chile, but it's now the country's most important white varietal. Two up and coming red varieties that have responded well to a range of micro-climates are Pinot Noir and Shiraz (Syrah in Chile). Chile can capitalise on Pinot if it enters the market with quality wines in the sub AU \$20 category, a scenario that will potentially put real pressure on New Zealand producers. Meanwhile, Shiraz (a variety that didn't exist in Chile until the mid 1990's now showing the most rapid growth - approx. 3500ha) is also revealing serious potential in cooler areas like San Antonio, Casablanca and Leyda, offering an alternative to Australian styles that some now find overpowering. These are very much works in progress and while the diversity is welcome, conservatives can rest assured that Cabernet Sauvignon still dominates. With over 40,000 hectares under vine, it's destined to remain the most planted Chilean variety for some time into the foreseeable future.

Map of Chile's Wine Regions

The map below offers a general guide to Chile's primary wine regions. These regions are determined by hydrographic basins and sub-basins according to latitude, and in general coincide with the regions formed by the political and administrative divisions of the country, from north to south. Each region can be divided into zones or valleys, formed by several small sectors or 'appellations'. Each of these regions offers its own distinctive terroirs, which in some cases, are still being profiled and further sub divided into still further micro-climates and appellations.*

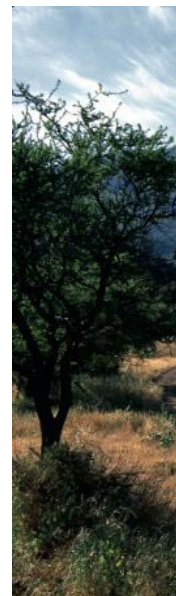


Profiles of Chile's Wine Regions

(Adapted from <http://www.winesofchile.org/>)

Limari Valley

Although first planted to vine in 1549 and an important source of wine during colonial times, wine grape production fell off centuries ago and the valley became known for its luscious tropical fruit, juicy table grapes for export, and the aromatic white muscat varieties for Pisco, Chile's favourite distilled spirit. Viticultural interest in the Valley was renewed in the early 1990s when technological advances allowed for new uses of this semi-arid and relatively infertile land. With just 80-100 mm (3.2-4 in) of rainfall per year, drip irrigation is essential for managing vines. Despite its semi-arid, Mediterranean climate and high summer temperatures, the Limarí Valley is an oasis for fine wine production. It is a transversal valley, extending from the majestic Andes eastward to the Pacific Ocean, which allows the curious "Camanchaca" fog to blanket the area with cool air each morning, and coastal breezes to reach inland to maintain mild summer temperatures. Approximately 400 km (250 mi) north of Santiago and approaching the southerly edge of the Atacama Desert, the Valley is home to a variety of national parks, international observatories, hot springs, archaeological sites, dazzling beaches, and the colonial city of La Serena, making it a favourite vacation spot as well as an exciting wine region.



Colchagua Valley

The Colchagua Valley is the larger and southernmost of the Rapel Valley's two sub-appellations. In little more than ten years, the Valley transformed itself from a sleepy, fertile farming area to a leading producer of some of Chile's finest red wines, and many long-time grape growers have established their own wineries and now offer wines under their own labels. Particularly worth watching are the expressive, full-bodied Cabernet, Carménère, Syrah, and Malbec. Many of the high-yielding varietal vineyards that once covered the fertile Valley floor have been replaced by meticulously-selected clonal varieties, vertically-positioned, and carefully-managed to control vigor. Vineyards now climb increasingly higher up the steep hillsides in search of the best possible balance between vine and the elements. Colchagua lies closer to the low and rolling Coastal Range than to the higher Andes and benefits from the cooling breezes that blow in directly from the sea, effectively extending the growing season for a long, slow ripening period. In fact, temperatures vary widely on any given summer day, which further contributes to the expressive, fruity, well-balanced character of the wines crafted here. The heart of the Valley's wine-growing area consists of San Fernando, Nancagua, Santa Cruz, Palmilla, and Peralillo, but enterprising efforts are pushing toward the sea and into the Marchihue and Lolol areas. Other innovations include a growing shift toward organic and even biodynamic agriculture.



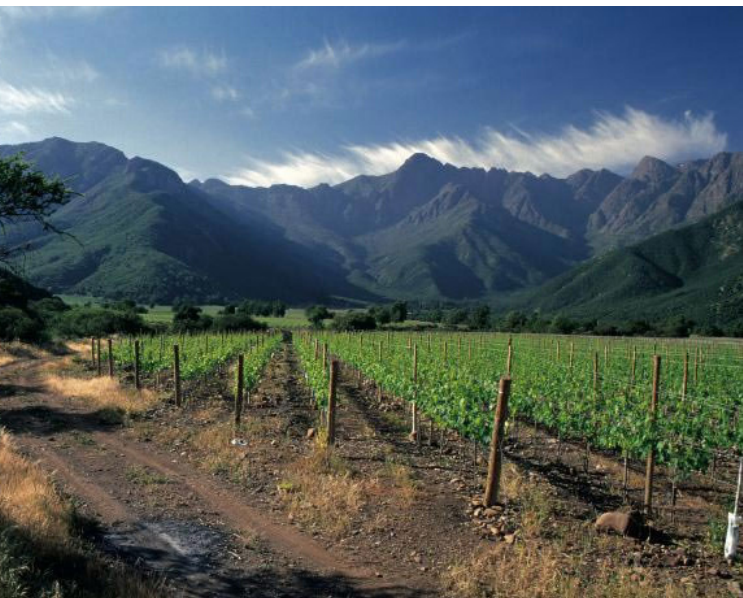
Aconcagua Valley

At 22,828 feet (6,956 meters), Mt. Aconcagua, the highest mountain in the Americas, towers over the Valley. It not only lends beauty to the horizon and attracts serious mountain climbers from around the world, but its snow-capped peak provides the irrigation water essential for agriculture in the Valley below. The region is primarily dedicated to fruit, vegetable, and flower production, but has produced wine grapes—mostly Cabernet Sauvignon—since the mid-19th century. The possibility of incorporating drip irrigation sparked renewed interest in the Valley beginning in the 1980s. The region pioneered the planting of Syrah in Chile and currently has large extensions of land dedicated to organic and biodynamic viticulture.



Casablanca Valley

The Casablanca Valley is Santiago's gateway to the sea. Anyone making the 1.5-hour trek between the capital and the major port of Valparaíso cuts directly across the Valley, now heavily planted to vines. Given that the highway is one of the country's most heavily travelled thoroughfares, the Valley's vineyards are among the most visible in the nation. This wasn't always true however. The first vineyards appeared little more than twenty years ago. Credit for the 'discovery' of the Valley is generally given to winemaking pioneer Pablo Morandé, who was looking for a cooler sector more appropriate for white grapes. Time, temperature, and maritime influence—not to mention international recognition—have long since confirmed his hunch, and the number of hectares dedicated to winegrowing expanded radically in the 1990s. Today a score of producers tend nearly 4,000 hectares of vines in the Valley. Knowledge of the area has expanded along with the plantations, and the Valley is no longer considered homogenous. An ample diversity of soil types and myriad microclimates are now recognized and incorporated into the decision-making process when new vineyards are planned. The higher, warmer, frost-free sections are suitable for some more forgiving black varieties, while the lower, cooler areas produce excellent fruit for cold-loving Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir. Frost-prone sectors along the Valley floor are often equipped with windmills that churn the icy pre-dawn air to keep the temperatures just above freezing to protect the fruit. In recognition of certain similarities between Casablanca and California's Napa Valley, the two valleys signed an alliance in 2002, prompting Casablanca to create a wine route and develop tourist attractions in the area. A number of wineries, some of which offer excellent restaurants, are easily accessible directly from the highway.



Arboleda Vineyard, Aconcagua Valley.



Colchagua Valley with chair lifts inset.



A typical site at the foothills of the Andes.

San Antonio Valley

San Antonio, which includes the now-famous Leyda zone, is one of the one of Chile's smallest viticultural areas. With vineyards as close as 4 km (2.5 mi) from the sea, it is also the most maritime region. The exploration for new terroir suggested that this area would be suitable for cool-climate varieties, such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, and Pinot Noir, and the results are more than encouraging. Cooler temperatures mean longer ripening periods and crisper acidity for leaner, more food-friendly wines. Some producers have experimented with other red varieties such as Syrah, which is normally planted in warmer zones such as Aconcagua and Colchagua. The result is a cool-climate Syrah that is causing many to re-think the concept of Chilean Syrah. Irrigation is clearly a concern here, and it is a prevailing factor in determining how much of the area can or will be planted. One determined producer constructed an 8-km aqueduct to feed his drip-lines.

Maipo Valley

The expansive and varied Maipo Valley is nestled between two mountain ranges, the Andes and the Coastal Mountains, and Chile's capital city, Santiago, sits in the middle. Due to the easy access to the surrounding agricultural areas, it comes as no surprise that many of the country's best-known and most traditional wineries were established in close proximity to the city. In the 19th century, when many wealthy industrial families planted vineyards near their country homes to the east and southeast of the capital, surely they never dreamed that the city would grow to engulf them. But today the city of 6,000,000 people continues to stretch out into the surrounding areas. Winemaking in the Maipo Valley today ranges from tiny boutique efforts to large-scale multi-million litre production centres, from nascent dreams to time-honoured traditions, from industrial-scale to biodynamic-and everything in between. The cause is not lost on foreign investors either. Winery architecture is equally diverse and includes everything from treasured national monuments to prize-winning ultra-modern designs. Although Chile's appellations of origin are defined from north to south, winemakers now generally agree that conditions vary much more widely from east to west, as the Maipo Valley clearly illustrates. Winemakers unofficially divide the valley into three distinct sectors: Alto Maipo, closest to the Andes; Central Maipo, along the Valley floor; and Pacific Maipo in the sector closest to the Pacific Ocean. All three enjoy a winemaker's ideal Mediterranean climate with hot, dry summers and cool rainy winters, but vary with respect to the degree of influence received by the mountains or the sea. At more than 650 meters (2,133 ft) above sea level, the Alto Maipo sector (sometimes referred to as the Andean or Upper Maipo) rises ever higher into the foothills southeast of Santiago and is strongly influenced by the mountains. Vast differences between daytime and night time temperatures encourage complex, richly colored wines and firmly structured tannins that give rise to a number of Chile's ultra-premium wines. To the south and southeast of Santiago, Central (or Middle) Maipo ranges from 550 to 650 meters (1,800-2,139 feet) above sea level, while the easternmost Pacific (or Lower) Maipo sector nearest the coast comprises areas below 550 meters (1,800 ft) above sea level. These areas tend to have warmer temperatures and more fertile soils, giving rise to softer, fruitier wines. Many winemakers blend wines from different Maipo vineyards to take advantage of the diverse qualities available in the three distinct areas.

Cachapoal Valley

The Rapel Valley, comprised of two sub-appellations, Cachapoal and Colchagua, begins just 100 km (62 miles) south of Santiago. Cachapoal is the northernmost of the two and is itself further divided from east to west. The majority of the wineries are located in the cool eastern sector between the Pan-American Highway and the Andes Mountains around Requingua and Rengo. On the opposite side of the highway and approaching the Coastal Mountains, the western sector around Peumo receives just enough cool maritime influence to create a warm, but not hot climate ideal for the area's distinctive, full-bodied, fruit-forward Carmenère. Black grapes predominate in the Valley, although there are specialized pockets of hillside Chardonnay as well. Virtually all of the vineyards are drip-irrigated due to the naturally arid conditions. Harvest begins with Chardonnay in late February and ends with Carmenère in April or early May. Less than 100 km from Santiago, Cachapoal provides a glimpse of history transformed. Modern huasos (Chilean cowboys) wear the same wide-brimmed, flat-topped hats (called chupayas) that their grandfathers did, although today they participate in rodeos for sport and ride horses for pleasure. Perhaps nowhere else is the success of Chile's wine business and economy in general more evident than in the size and styles of the powerful 4-wheel drive pick-up trucks they drive today.



Maipo Valley.

Curico Valley

Curicó is Chile's second largest wine producing Valley. Only its southern neighbour Maule has more area planted to vine. French *Vitis vinifera* vines were first planted here in the mid-1800s, and most of Chile's top producers have vineyards, with or without cellars, in the region. Curicó's modern winemaking history began, however, when Spanish producer Miguel Torres began his first New World endeavour here in the 1970s. Numerous factors, such as the Mediterranean climate, a 5-month summer dry season with an average temperature of 20°C (68°F) and a maximum of 30°C (86°F), sufficient rainfall (700 mm / 28 in) and well-drained alluvial soils make this Valley viti / viticulturally attractive. Winemaking is the region's primary economic activity. This relatively large valley is sub-divided into the Teno River Valley to the north, and the Lontué River Valley to the south. Most of the area's winegrowing and winemaking activity is concentrated in Lontue, primarily near the town of Molina. The two rivers come together to form the Mataquito River, which flows out through the Sagrada Familia to the sea. Curicó's winding rivers and diverse geographic landscape provide the opportunity to work with many different varieties. In fact, national statistics (SAG) list 32 different types of wine grapes grown in the area (17 red and 15 white). Curicó is also home to the country's largest vineyards, and vast extensions of vine-laden lands are visible from the highway. In fact, travellers heading south to the Lake Country pass through one section of 8 km (5 mi) without interruption.



Harvest at Los Vascos Vineyard, Colchagua Valley.



Itata Valley Vineyard.

Maule Valley

Maule is Chile's largest producing valley, with 43% of the country's total planted area concentrated here at the southern end of the long Central Valley. Once predominately planted to the rustic variety País, many of the older, head-trained vines have now given way to vertically-shoot positioned Cabernet Sauvignon, while Merlot, Cabernet Franc and Carmenère follow close behind, and there is an impressive assortment of varieties lending new expression to the valley. This is one of Chile's most geographically diverse valleys, and it can be divided into the Pacific, Inter-Andes-Pacific, and Andes regions. The climate is Mediterranean sub-humid throughout, with variations in the different sectors. The Pacific section, closest to the Coastal Mountain range, has higher temperatures and lower rainfalls (700 mm / 28 in per year), while the opposite is true when moving toward the Andean piedmont with average annual rainfalls of up to 1,000 mm (39 in). Add to this a broad range of soil types and it is easy to see why there are a diversity of flavours and styles being developed in the Maule. Several large international investors (California's Kendall Jackson amongst others) have been attracted to this region. It also has many small boutique style independents. Chile's first organic wines were produced in this area in Cauquenes.

Itata Valley

The northernmost sector of the 3-valley 'Southern Region,' Itata is no newcomer to wine. Some of the earliest vineyards were planted near the port city of Concepción during colonial times. The Spanish black grape País still predominates in the area, although Cabernet Sauvignon leads the selection of French varieties. Muscat of Alexandria is the front-runner in white grape production, but its Chardonnay is the attention-getter. In colonial times, it was the abundant water supply that attracted winemakers. Annual rainfall is concentrated during the winter months and averages more than 1,100 mm per year, alleviating the need for extensive irrigation systems. Interest dwindled as winegrowing became more viable closer to Santiago. Today however, improving transportation systems and the drive for new terroirs have led a handful of new wineries to set up in Itata, where shining stainless steel tanks and vertically-trained vines provide odd contrast to traditional head-trained vines and ancient woary to apparent logtter than Maipo, which is more than 500 km (310 mi) closer to the equator! Temperatures swing widely during the course of the day, and the quality of the light encourages excellent colour development in the grapes.

Chile's Primary Grape Varieties (6)

The 2007 registry, published in January 2009, indicates the following:

- Total Area planted to wine grapes : 117,559 hectares
- Total Red varieties : 88,703 ha (75%)
- Total White varieties : 28,856 ha (25%)

Primary Red Varieties (in hectares)

- Cabernet Sauvignon : 40,766
- Merlot : 13,283
- Carménère : 7,284
- Syrah : 3,513
- Pinot Noir : 1,413
- Cabernet Franc : 1,177
- Malbec : 1,050

Primary White Varieties: (in hectares)

- Sauvignon Blanc: 8,862
- Chardonnay : 8,733
- Moscatel of Alexandria : 6,035
- Riesling : 305
- Viognier : 309
- Gewürztraminer : 195



Bio Bio Valley

With an average rainfall similar to that of the Medoc (more than 1,300 mm / 51 in per year), a deep and generous subterranean water table, and cool evening mists that creep down the Andean foothills, the Bío Bío is both blessed and challenged. Fruit ripens slowly this far south, and the harvest begins a full 20 to 25 days after the harvests in more northerly valleys have reached full swing. Rain and cold weather make winegrowing here more complicated than in other areas. Traditionally the vineyards were massively planted with the little-demanding variety País used in simple rustic wines for local consumption. Today enterprising winemakers have initiated a transition toward more exciting varieties less suited to the warm conditions in Chile's more northerly climes. Chardonnay, Gewurztraminer, and Riesling express themselves very well here with higher acidities closer to those found in Old World bottlings.

Malleco Valley

Malleco is currently Chile's southernmost appellation, although experimental vineyards have been planted much further south in Osorno. The conditions are cold and very rainy this far south. Chardonnay does quite well, but most varieties do not reach maturity here. Wine grapes are grown under similar conditions in other countries, such as France, but the vinification process requires chaptalization, which is illegal in Chile.



Red varieties continue to dominate in Chile, with Cabernet Sauvignon still the most widely planted.

New Chilean Shipment: Premium Chilean Wines

Shipped by Nicks Wine Merchants...

Carmenere - Chile's New World Vision of Pre-Phylloxera France.

Carmenère [pronounced *car-men-YEHR*] offers a style of red unlike anything else in the world. Naturally, we were delighted to introduce the varietal to Australian wine lovers with our first shipment but for those who are completely oblivious to this unusual variety, some background information: Carmenere is the sixth member of the Cabernet Sauvignon family (the others being Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Malbec and Petit Verdot) and can be produced in a variety of styles. Chile's expansion into new terroirs means that there's already a remarkable diversity to be found. Losh's group of Sommeliers, for example, reported a tasting of twelve Carmeneres that had more stylistic diversity than would an equivalent line up of Burgundies. When yields are kept in check, the results can be as explosive as the best Australian Shiraz, delivering enormous colour, silky texture and spicy, dark fruit flavours.

Once common in Bordeaux, particularly in the Medoc (where it was known as 'Grande Vidure'), Carmenère is now rarely found in France; firstly because most plantings were wiped out in 1867 due to the vine disease, 'phylloxera'; secondly, because it is the last of the red grapes to ripen, and in Bordeaux often does not fully ripen resulting in green flavours. This combined with its erratic tendency to develop a condition called 'coulure', (poor fruit set after flowering) and its resultant low yields have contributed to the demise of Carmenère throughout Europe.

Long thought to be Merlot vines, Chilean cuttings have thrived for 150 years. It was only in 1993 when the renowned viticulturist, Professor Jean-Michel Boursiquot of Ensa de Montpellier, carried out a detailed scientific survey that winegrowers realized the two similar vines had been growing together for more than a century. (7) When Chilean winemakers witnessed the colour and taste of the pure Carmenere, they realized they had been ignoring a huge asset. Along side Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere now represents one of the country's signature varietals.



Carmenere.



2007 Arboleda Carmenere

Region: Colchagua Valley.

A superb follow up to the 2006. Opaque black crimson colour with deep crimson mauve hue. Perfumed nose of violets, spice, fresh blackberry and cherry. The palate delivers excellent weight and mouthfeel. Flavours of dark cherry, blackberry, dark chocolate and spice. Velvet tannins. Spicy back palate and aftertaste with black pepper emerging. A New World classic! Cellar 3-4 years (2012-2013) Alc/Vol: 14.5% **Rating: 98 points**

2007 Caliterra Tributo Single Vineyard Block Boldo Carmenere

Region: Colchagua Valley.

Outstanding colour. Opaque black purple with black purple hue. Top note of freshly crushed blackberry followed by a touch of vanilla, spice and liquorice. The palate is generous with flavours of blackberry, dark chocolate, spice and cherries. Fine grained soft tannins. Aftertaste of dark chocolate, spice and cherry. Cellar 3-4 years (2012-2013) Alc/Vol: 14.0% **Rating: 95 points**

The French Connection: Los Vascos and Lafite Rothschild.

Despite being historically linked to Spain, Chile's wine history has been most profoundly influenced by French winemaking, particularly that of Bordeaux. This association is exemplified at one of Chile's best vineyard sites, 'Los Vascos', an Estate in Colchagua who specialise in the production of superb Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as other Bordeaux varietals under the supervision of one of the Old World's most prestigious Chateaux - Lafite Rothschild. Not content with the success of just one vineyard, over the last 20 years, the owners of Chateau Lafite, Domaines Barons de Rothschild, have made strategic acquisitions around the globe, selecting specific sites that possess the terroir required to produce exciting New World wines with Lafite Rothschild's First Growth know-how. In order to achieve this ambition, Domaines Barons de Rothschild has developed a simple philosophy: Respect each terroir; Use local winemaking expertise in tandem with that of its own team of winemakers; Provide the necessary investment to enable each project to succeed; Have the vision to look at the long term; Allow the time it takes to make great wines that are a true reflection of their provenance. In addition to these guiding principles, Domaines Barons de Rothschild employ their own cooperage, which is located at Chateau Lafite. The oak, from Allier and Nivernais forests, is left to air dry for two years before being broken down into staves for barrel making, after which five coopers produce 2,000 barrels per year, destined for use at the various Rothschild estates around the world. This comprehensive commitment to perfection enables Domaines Barons de Rothschild to succeed in working with like minded people from different cultures, with each group recognising each others worth and contribution.

Domaines Barons de Rothschild took over the Los Vascos Estate in 1988. At the time, 220 hectares were planted. Prior to purchasing, the Rothschild team visited many properties and tasted many wines to ensure that the terroir they purchased was the best possible acquisition. The vineyard is located 40 km from the Pacific Ocean, some 130m above sea level. The site has excellent exposure to sunlight as well as adequate water resources, semi arid soils and is frost free. From 1983 to 1994, the vineyard was restructured with bores drilled for water, a weather monitoring station was installed and the winery refitted. Stainless steel tanks, new pneumatic presses and a barrel cellar were also part of the refurbishments.

When the venture first started, Rothschild's brief to the winemaking team was modest "...make a really good \$7 wine". (8) Only after ten years of experimentation did he feel they were ready to make wines of the highest quality. The Estate's wines continue to be made under the supervision of Lafite's winemaking team. As the vineyards have matured, so the quality of Los Vascos wines have improved, particularly that of the premium wines, 'Grande Reserve' & the 'Dix de Los Vascos'.



The Los Vascos Estate & Vineyards.



2007 Los Vascos Cabernet Sauvignon Colchagua Valley

An outstanding Bordeaux inspired Cabernet at a bargain basement price. Very deep crimson mauve colour with deep purple mauve hue. Top note of cedar, followed by blackcurrant and confectionary, with a hint of cigar box delivering a refined sniff. Very French in its aromatics which is also reflected on the palate. The palate displays refinement, with length and classic Bordeaux restraint. Flavours of cedar, cigar box and blackcurrant are overlaid with a hint of dark chocolate. Exceptionally long aftertaste.

Cellar 5-8 years (2014-2017) Alc/Vol: 13.5% **Rating: 94 points**

2007 Los Vascos Grande Reserve Cabernet Colchagua Valley

Superb colour - Very deep black crimson with mauve purple hue. Strong varietal nose with distinctive Cabernet lift. Cassis, blackcurrant and violets deliver a perfumed lift. The palate is relatively light but classic in its structure. Flavours of blackcurrant, cedar, spice and dark chocolate. Outstanding length and depth. Fine dryish tannins. Very spicy back palate. Perfect balance. Nuances of dark chocolate emerge on the aftertaste. Cellar 4-5 years (2013-2014) Alc/Vol: 14%

Rating: 96 points

2006 Los Vascos Le Dix Cabernet Sauvignon Colchagua Valley

The pinnacle of winemaking for Barons de Rothschild Lafite's Chilean operations. Medium body, deep crimson colour with deep crimson mauve hue. Perfumed nose of violets, cedar and confectionary with blackcurrant end note. A superb sniff. The palate is reminiscent of classed growth Bordeaux with real elegance and refinement without being thin. Excellent weight with mouthfilling palate flavours. Cedar, blackcurrant spice and liquorice allsorts fill the palate and are enhanced by a very spicy back palate. Excellent length and perfectly balanced, with fine dry tannins. Very long aftertaste of cedar and spice.

Cellar 5-8 years (2012-2015) Alc/Vol: 14.0% **Rating: 97 points**

Reaching the Summit. Sena and the Tasting that Changed Chile.

In the last two decades, several ambitious Chilean producers have attempted to define the limits of Chile's viticultural potential by producing an ultimate expression of terroir. Known as 'icon wines', the success of the most famous example, 'Sena', is partly attributable to the flamboyant promotional efforts of its creator, Eduardo Chadwick, a fifth generation family member of Vina Errazuriz. The concept started out as a joint venture between Chadwick and pioneering giant of California's Napa Valley wine industry, Robert Mondavi. Their four year search for an ideal terroir ended in 1999, when a hillside vineyard was acquired in the Ocoa District, at the western end of the Aconcagua Valley, 41km from the Pacific Ocean. 45 hectares were planted to Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot, Carmenère and Malbec.

In particular, it was Chadwick's organising of international tastings and seminars that put Sena in the limelight. Starting at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Potsdamer Platz in Berlin, Chadwick invited forty of Europe's leading wine writers, critics, sommeliers and trade to taste 'blind' a selection of the world's finest wines, including Chateau Margaux, Chateau Latour, Chateau Lafite, Sassacaia and Tignanello from the 2000 and 2001 vintages. "...The event promised a David-and-Goliath-style contest between Chile and some of France's and Italy's top wine estates. The atmosphere was intense. No labels were visible and nothing but the chinking of glasses could be heard as each taster strained every taste bud to identify and evaluate the wines. But it was Chile that bagged three of the top five scores". (9) Sena came out on top. "We were trying to prove that we were in the company of the best wines of the world," commented Chadwick. "It was a milestone for us demonstrating the quality of our wines; we never expected this." (10)



Scenes from the 'Berlin Tasting'. See www.theberlintasting.com for more information on this historical event.

Andrew Catchpole, wine writer for UK's Daily Telegraph, who took part in the tasting reflected afterwards "I have long been a fan of Chilean wines, particularly those priced between £5 and £10, but I had always thought of Sena and Viñedo Chadwick and several other expensive cult wines over-priced and over-hyped. Berlin changed my mind. Given the choice of a bottle of Lafite for £285 or six Sena with change to spare, the Chilean newcomers suddenly look remarkably good value. The real lesson of Berlin is not to let price or labels pull the wool over your eyes. Neither is a guarantee of quality." (11)

'Roadshow' tastings were repeated in Brazil (3rd), Tokyo (2nd) and Toronto (5th & 6th) with similar results. Sena has since cemented its place as Chile's first icon wine, a testimony to the prudence of the Mondavi-Chadwick partnership and Chile's incredible potential. The 2006 release is a brilliant follow up to our first shipment, a wine that had many seasoned wine lovers declaring Sena to be one of the finest reds they'd tried.



Eduardo Chadwick



2006 Sena Dry Red
Region: Aconcagua Valley, Chile.

The high point of the collaboration between the late Robert Mondavi and Eduardo Chadwick. The blend is composed of 55% Cabernet (for structure) 10% Merlot (for rich berry flavour) 10% Carmenere (for spice and black pepper flavours) 13% Petit Verdot (for colour) and 6% Cabernet Franc (for ripe raspberry flavours). The wine has been matured for 18 months in French Oak.

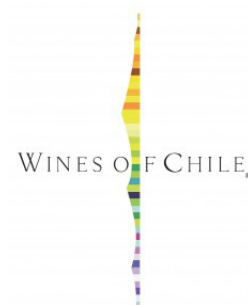
Opaque black crimson colour with black crimson mauve hue. Lifted aromatics, Classic Cabernet blend nose. Top note of violets followed by spice, mulberry and truffle. Velvet smooth tannin structure. Mouthfilling flavours of mulberry, dark chocolate and blackcurrant over a spicy background. Excellent length and depth. Very long aftertaste of mulberry, spice and violet infusions.

Cellar 5-8 years (2014-2017) Alc/Vol: 14.5%

Rating: 97 points

Footnotes & Bibliography

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