

Winning wines from Chile

Some of the country's best are now available in Canada

This past January, a number of Canadians, including several *Wine Access* writers, were asked to judge at the 7th Annual Wines of Chile Awards.

Throughout the week, we tasted a large number of new wines and, following the competition, many of them had the opportunity to tour several of the regions and wineries. The list that follows includes some favourite wines from the competition — all currently, or soon to be, available in Canada.

For full results from the 2010 Wines of Chile Awards, visit winesofchile.org.

Vineyards in the Elqui Valley, Chile

95 SANTA RITA 2005 Casa Real Cabernet Sauvignon
Buin, Valle del Maipo, Region del Valle Central, Chile
AB \$75



The latest Casa Real is the best I have ever tasted. And while it is not yet available in Canada, it should be headed this way soon, so fans should keep a look out for it. Made with 40-plus-year-old fruit, the '05 Casa Real entices you with its sublime nose of mint, cassis and spicy liquorice, all supporting some pure plum fruit. The textures are the best ever. So supple and so balanced — zero green elements. Nothing but rich, dense fruit in a sophisticated cabernet sauvignon that should be sold across the country that buys so much regular Santa Rita wine. The best since 1999 and, perhaps, already even better than that fine bottle. (AG)

94 SEÑA 2007
Aconcagua Valley, Chile
BC \$76 private wine stores, ON \$79, NS \$73



Watch for the new vintage of the flagship red of the Errazuriz empire. It is now 100 percent single vineyard, grown in a 16-hectare hillside vineyard in the Aconcagua Valley that is all biodynamically farmed. This vintage blends all five Bordeaux varieties, led by cabernet sauvignon at 57 percent. Within the resulting opulent richness, it's incredible to feel that firm Bordeaux centre. This is one of the most Euro-style wines in Chile. It's full-bodied, complex, beautifully centred and exceedingly long on the finish. Firmly tannic and brusque now, but you know this will live a long time. Best 2015 to 2025 and beyond. (DL)

93 EMILIANA 2007 Coyam
Valle del Colchagua, Valle del Rapel, Region del Valle Central, Chile
BC \$35 specialty listing, AB \$23, MB \$30



Coyam takes a big step up and embraces the terrific 2007 vintage. The aromatics and nose are the best yet, replete with blackberries, savoury red fruits, floral mineral aspects and a dusting of toffee, chocolate and coffee. The palate is rich and smooth. Its dark fruit flavours preview a glossy, slippery texture that slides down the throat effortlessly. This is quintessential biodynamic fruit, alive with flavours. The grapes come off the 150-hectare Los Robles vineyard surrounded by oak trees, or *coyam* as they are called in the native dialect. (AG)

92 MONTES 2006 Alpha M
Apalta, Chile
BC \$88, AB \$80



The Alpha M from Apalta was the first Icon Chilean wine produced in 1996. Improving every vintage since then, a recent vertical showed their good cellaring potential, all the wines are aging gracefully. A slower ripening vintage in 2006 resulted in more elegance showing in the blend of cab sauv, cab franc, merlot, and petit verdot (80/10/5/5).

Low yields with 18 months in new French oak add complexity to the classical balance of this intense, yet soft, fruity, classy statement wine. Very impressive. (SC)

91 CALITERRA 2008 Tributo
Carmenère
Colchagua Valley, Chile
MB \$15, NB \$20



The colour is deep purple, with ultra-ripe, concentrated blackberry and blueberry fruit flavours and notable, but integrated, sweet wood (American and French). The palate is full, fat and seemingly soft, but there is so much fruit extract that significant tannins come across as plush and well-coated. Some herbal-spice flavours typical of the variety emerge, but this is anything but the exceedingly green versions of days gone by. Very good to excellent length completes the picture. Drink now, or hold 5 to 7 years. (JS)

90 CONO SUR 2007 Limited Edition 20 Barrels Pinot Noir
Casablanca Valley, Chile
BC \$25, AB \$26, QC \$28



Cono Sur has a special knack with pinot noir and kudos go out to winemakers Adolfo Hurtado and Matias Rios for encouraging the local terroir to show in the best grapes. Underrated impressive cherries, strawberries and other fresh red fruits emerge in an earthy, spicy, lively, current-drinking style that is balanced enough to integrate, round out and develop even more complexity with a few more years in the bottle. The 2008 was judged the best pinot noir at the 7th Annual Wines of Chile Competition in Santiago in January 2010. (SC)

90 DE MARTINO 2008 Legado Reserve Chardonnay
Limarí Valley, Chile
NB \$21



De Martino winemaker Marcelo Retamal was one of the early believers in the Limarí Valley as a source of well-balanced, highly mineral-driven wines — chardonnay, in particular — and this example proves his instinct correct. With complexity well above the average, the Legado Reserve has well-defined citrus, pear and stone fruit character, and mouth-salivating, wet chalk/stone flavours. Lively acidity is softened by complex and creamy lees, and the finish lingers nicely. Really well-crafted, overall. Drink, or hold 2 to 4 years. (JS)

90 SANTA RITA 2007 Medalla Real Cabernet Sauvignon
Maipo Valley, Chile
ON \$19



Many in Chile consider 2007 the best vintage of all time, and given the performance of this workhorse cabernet, it is obviously true. It has both size and density, with some elegance, to boot. Deeply coloured and brimming with classic Maipo cassis, eucalyptus, liquorice and clove on the nose. Quite firm, but well integrated, with excellent length. This should rest a couple of years, but should live past 2020. I have had 15-year-old bottles already, and each one was showing well. (DL)

89 MATETIC VINEYARDS 2007 Corralillo Syrah
San Antonio, Chile
AB \$29



This fourth-generation family from Croatia pioneered the first cold climate syrah back in 1999, in the spectacular hilly Rosario Valley of San Antonio. Now this modern biodynamic winery has two successful syrah labels, both spending 12 months in French oak. The Corralillo is grown on poor granite/sandy soil, with deep roots planted on hillsides. It is showing delicious, easy, chocolate/mocha and fruit, with a hotter finish. This is perfect for barbecue. (SC)

88 DE MARTINO 2007 Legado Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon
Maipo, Chile
QC \$18



If you want to smell the eucalyptus of Maipo cabernet, here it is. It's very subtle, hidden behind the cassis, the gravel and the hint of vanilla. But rather than inspiring memories of Vicks Vap-o-Rub, it refreshes and adds complexity to this wine. Ripe, powerful and not at all heavy, with solid enough tannin to hold the wine together. One of Chile's premier wineries. (BZ)

88 AMAYNA 2007 Chardonnay
San Antonio-Leyda, Chile
BC \$39, QC \$25



Possibly the best chardonnay I tasted while in Chile. Hint of caramel, rich and buttery, but finishing on a salty, mineral note. Balance, elegance and depth — this is a model of what they should be doing in the cooler climes. (BZ) **WA**



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Chile's Next Big Dilemma

Moving from the bargain bin to everyone's wine list

By the time you read this piece, Chilean wine producers will be well on their way to recovering from February's massive and devastating earthquake that left more than 486 people dead, 29 missing and a trail of destruction across the 6th, 7th and 8th districts of Central Chile.

From broken barrels and bottles to burst stainless steel tanks, 125 million litres of wine had literally gone down the drain, along with a fair chunk of infrastructure that allowed for the efficient movement of wine from the many wineries to the country's Pacific ports. Of course, none of this is as regrettable as the deaths and the despair such a catastrophic event can wreak upon any country.

It is hard to know what the long-term effect of the earthquake will be on Chile's wine producers, but the industry has rallied admirably.

Chile has, for a while now, been sitting at an impasse. It has long established itself as a prime source of "value" (read: cheap) wines. The result is Chilean producers have been hard pressed to elevate their image beyond brand value onto the more glamorous international wine stage, where top-quality wines that express their spectacular terroir live. Open any interesting restaurant wine list in the world and you will see what I mean.

All the usual suspects will be there — Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne, Napa, Barossa, Piedmont and Tuscany. You may find some malbec from Mendoza, Austrian grüner veltliner and German riesling, but, more often than not, Chilean wines will be notably absent.

Chile has had some relative commercial and global success with carmenère, but a single varietal does not a heavyweight wine producing country establish.

The future of Chilean wine is the evolution beyond the value tag that has plagued the

long, thin country for far too long — plagued and sold the potential of the country short. The old axiom holds true: "What we obtain too cheaply, we esteem too lightly." And so it has been for Chilean wine.

Arguing against value is not something I'm used to doing, but if "value" means bland, faceless brands then it is doing no more favours to the consumer than it is for the industry. It is time that quality speaks for itself, and that producers do not hesitate to let consumers pay for it.

Chile's strength is its fabulously natural and isolated wine regions, uncontaminated by most of what goes on in North America. Natural wines, all of them, should be its focus for the next decade. Certainly, my notes from judging at the 7th Annual Wines of Chile Competition suggest syrah, pinot noir and sauvignon blanc will likely be the stars of the next decade, along with some grapes, like carignan, riesling and more innovative and creative red blends.

To that end, hope is on the horizon, as the current Chilean mantra seems to be to get to the coast or up the mountains. Neither area is cheap to farm, and you can expect to pay more for such wine, but the quality of Limari syrah, Bio-Bio pinot noir, Marchigue carmenère, Leyda sauvignon blanc, Colchagua cabernet sauvignon, San Antonio chardonnay or Elqui riesling — just name the region and the wine it produces — is so far removed from the Chilean wine made in the 1990s, it should provide more than enough impetus for continued change.

No one knows better what the wines of Chile have to offer than the Chileans themselves. Shaking the "cheap" image is not going to be just about raising prices or planting



in better terroir. There has to be an attitude change. The industry's youngest and brightest will need to step up and pursue the next 20 years with the same passion that Aurelio Montes, Eduardo Chadwick, Agustin Huneeus, Alvaro Espinoza and Ignacio Recabarren have done in the last two decades.

One such promising group is The Movement of Independent Vintners (MOVI). MOVI is an association of small, quality-oriented Chilean wineries that have come together in pursuit of a common goal to make wine *personally*, on a human scale, and to promote a passion for the endeavours of growing grapes and crafting fine wine.

It is going to take this kind of enthusiasm and dedication, across the board, for Chile to embrace its potential and establish itself as what it deserves to be — one of the best wine-producing nations in the world. **WA**

Illustration by Mike Kerr