

### Warming Up With Chilean Red Wines



After returning to a democracy and free market economy in the 1980s, it was - as if out of nowhere - that Chile re-entered the international wine scene.

With 3,000 miles of coastline to the west, the Andes Mountains to the east, the Atacama desert to the north, and the Antarctic to the south, Chile's long, narrow geography has created a natural barrier that has resulted in one of the most pristine ecosystems in the world.

Free from most pests, including Phylloxera (which has ravaged vines throughout the world), most producers have no need to spray any pesticides, making it quite easy to farm organically. A significant amount of production is located within the central valley, which stretches from the Maipo valley, the closest wine region to Santiago, south 155 miles to the Maule Valley. The most popular wines are those made from Cabernet Sauvignon, which accounts for over 50% of the country's dark skinned varieties. While Carmenere has been marketed as the country's signature grape, it only accounts for just 12% of all red grapes. Areas in the far north, as well as the two coastal regions of Casablanca and San Antonio, are carving out their niche for cool climate varieties including Syrah and Pinot Noir.

Winemaking in Chile began about 450 years ago. By the later part of the 18th century, the introduction of traditional European varieties, such as cabernet sauvignon, petite verdot and merlot, resulted in a dramatic increase of wine exports from Chile.

I have to admit, when I think Chile, I rarely think about pinot noir, but the **2013 Cono Sur Pinot Noir Reserva Especial** is about to change that. The fragrant nose features a bouquet of mushroom and forest floor while the palate exhibits savory flavors of plum and dark cherry. There is just a hint of mineral on the plush finish that really brings all of the flavors into balance. **\$15**

The **2009 La Playa Block Selection Carmenere** is an alluring example of the Bordeaux variety that was considered long-lost until it was rediscovered in Chile a decade ago. Chile has adopted this French red variety as its national grape. This version features concentrated flavors of blackberry jam, peppery spices, fresh herbs on a round, smooth frame. Firm tannins support a long, structured finish where hints of espresso glide in. **\$15**

Chilean winemakers have set their sights on the north, northern Rhone that is. The Colchagua Valley is home to the **2010 Viña Montes Alpha Syrah**. This deep, rich red Rhone Ranger is bursting with flavors of dark plum, blackberry, blueberry cobbler and pepper. Subtle notes of tobacco and pepper bring up the rear on the well-rounded finish. **\$17**

If you're a regular listener of this segment, then you have heard me sing the praises of Cousiño-Macul over the years as one of the best values in ageable red wines. And the **2010 Cousiño-Macul Finis Terrae** from the Maipo Valley is no exception. Developed to go head-to-head with the First Growths of Bordeaux the just-released 2010 Finis Terrae, made from 60% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot, and 10% Syrah, is a breakthrough vintage for this wine, which is aged for 15 months in French oak. It has a remarkable nose, with scents of dark plum, accented by notes of earth and damp forest floor. Flavors of rich black cherry, blueberry liqueur and blackberry fruit is supple and amazingly sophisticated. While it is definitely enjoyable now, this wine has the structure and balance to age gracefully for an additional 10 to 20 years. Decant one-half hour before serving. **\$20**