



South America 2020

A *Decanter* guide to the wines, regions and styles

Produced in association with





Welcome to *Decanter’s* 2020 South America Guide



‘Todo se transforma’ – everything changes – is one of the best-loved songs by Jorge Drexler, Uruguay’s most famous musician. Drexler lives in Madrid these days, but his lyrics, complete with a reference to a glass of red, could be applied to the South American wine scene over the last three decades. The transformation has been remarkable. I’ve been lucky enough to sit in the front row and watch it happen, as it were, visiting the continent at least twice a year. In their different ways, Argentina, Chile and Uruguay have all joined the modern wine world, each of them bringing something

unique, whether Malbec, old-vine Carignan or Tannat. However much you can see and appreciate as a frequent visitor – putting South American wines in a global context is also important – having people you trust on the ground is vital too. They’re closer to the gossip, see the trends as they develop, watch the vineyards change colour and stay up to date with new ventures as well as current releases from older ones.

That’s the advantage of this guide. In large part, it’s written by South Americans. And not just any old South Americans. Patricio Tapia, Marina Gayan MW, Alejandro Iglesias and Joaquin Hidalgo are all perceptive observers of the local wine scene, with palates to match. Of the foreigners, Amanda Barnes lives in Mendoza and is one of the best wine writers in Mendoza, covering both sides of the Andes; Chris Losh is a first-rate journalist from the UK who is always worth reading; and Alistair Cooper MW is a Chilean expert who once lived in the country and returns regularly to what the poet Pablo Neruda called his ‘long, thin ship’.

This, then, is a snapshot of the South American wine scene at an exciting moment in its development. I can still remember what the local *vino* tasted like in the early 1990s, and, in most cases, it was pretty parochial stuff aimed at domestic palates that valued oxidation and time in old barrels over perfume and primary fruit. After that, what we might call the first ‘modern’ wines were heavily influenced by American critics, consumers and consultants, often emphasising power, ripeness and new oak. It was a necessary change, even if it exaggerated what was best about South American wines.

Now these countries have entered a new phase. Call it quieter or subtler if you like, but I think it’s more about self-confidence. The best South American winemakers, many of whom travel widely to Europe’s leading wine regions, have returned home determined to make the best of their own terroirs and traditions, rather than copy what happens elsewhere. The result is wines with greater freshness and precision, as well as a sense of place, or rather places.

Some of these places are very new indeed – Alcohuz in Chile, Maldonado in Uruguay and Uspallata in Argentina are all new, world-class areas that have emerged in the last decade. Imagine where South America will be in 30 years’ time. I’m looking forward to the ride.

Tim Atkin MW, contributing editor to Decanter

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Breaking new ground

In striving to establish a more terroir-based approach to viticulture, wine producers in Argentina are revealing the striking diversity of their land – and producing wines with a truer sense of place, finds Marina Gayan MW

Argentina's vineyards have undergone a more radical transformation in the past two decades than in any other period in the country's almost 500-year viticultural history. Returning to my homeland after 20 years in the UK, I have discovered that Argentina's long-heralded potential is finally becoming an exciting reality. A country known for its easy-going Malbec has been transformed by a colourful spectrum of quality, diversity and nuance.

At the heart of this transformation lies the ultimate quest: to express a sense of place. This is being achieved through sophisticated modern viticulture, all the while preserving Argentina's heritage of grape diversity. The transformation has been driven by a group of focused, passionate, thoughtful and creative producers who are, quite literally, breaking new ground.

Key to understanding the evolution of wine-growing in Argentina is the relationship between the vineyards and the mountains. The main producing region, Mendoza, is a desert. From the earliest times, wine production has been dependent on flood irrigation from Andean snowmelt. The long and intricate network of irrigation channels was originally devised by the Huarpes, the pre-Colombian civilisation that predated the Spanish arrival in the region in 1551. For hundreds of years these fixed

channels limited the scope of vine plantings. However, the development of drip irrigation in the late 1980s opened up possibility of planting vines in places not previously viable for viticulture.

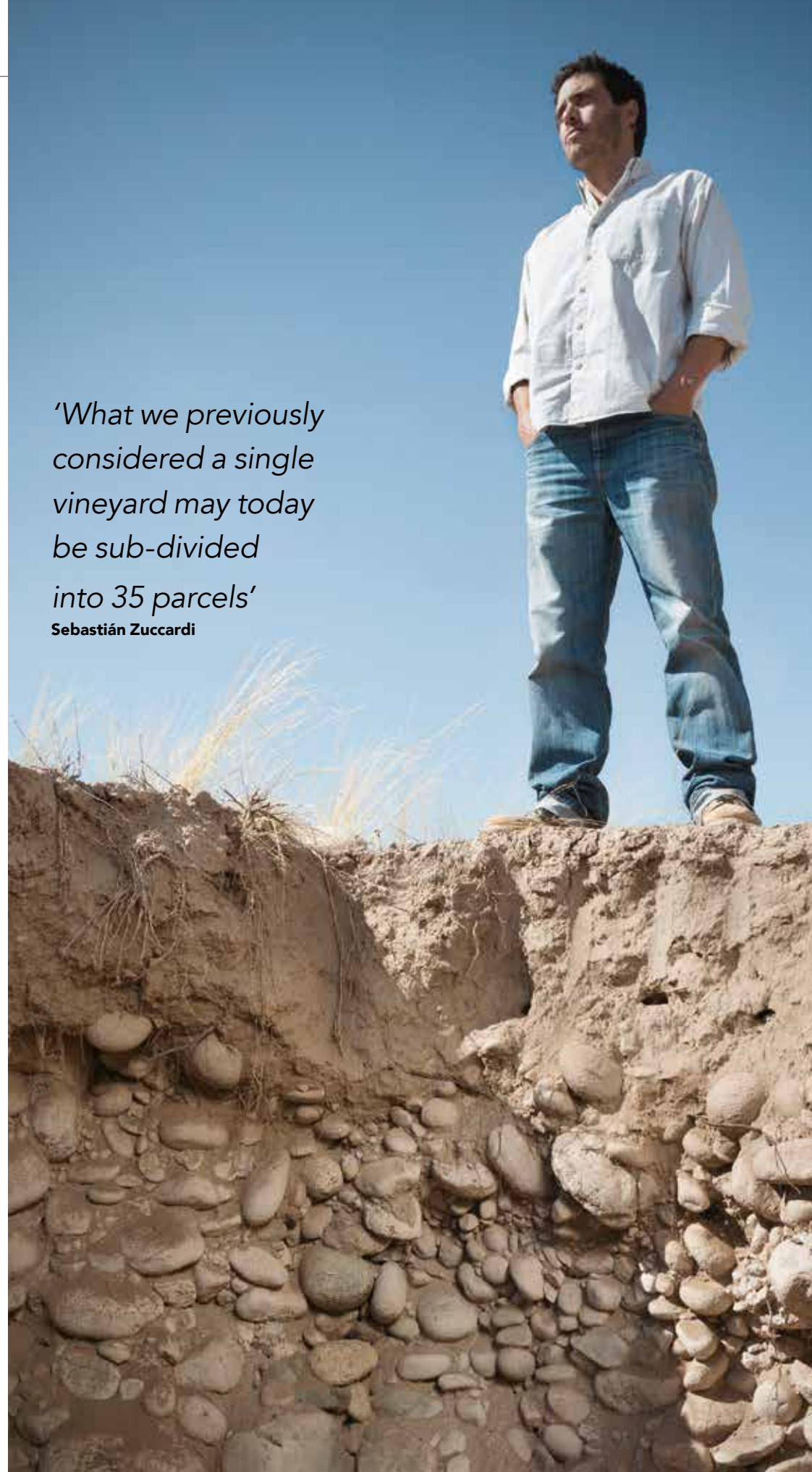
Aiming high

In search of grapes of 'grand cru' quality, Nicolás Catena ventured up into the mountains. 'It was clear to me that if we wanted to produce high-quality wines, we needed to plant in cooler areas of Mendoza,' he says. In 1993 he planted the Adrianna Vineyard in the Uco Valley's Gualtallary region, at 1,500m above sea level. Nobody had ever tried to ripen red grapes at such chilly heights. But ripen they did, and high-altitude Malbec was born. Fast-forward to today and Gualtallary is considered one of Argentina's top-quality sites, with 2,200ha of vineyards planted.

Since then, Argentina's vineyard map has stretched out in every direction, into increasingly challenging terroirs, cooler areas and ever-higher altitudes. In the west, mountain vineyards are defying supposed viticultural limits. The Precordillera vineyards, for example, climb up to the Calingasta and Pedernal valleys in San Juan, rising up to more than 2,000m above sea level in Uspallata and La Carrera in Mendoza, and reaching their highest altitude (3,329m) in Uquía, Jujuy, Argentina's northernmost viticultural region.

'What we previously considered a single vineyard may today be sub-divided into 35 parcels'

Sebastián Zuccardi



Estancia Uspallata

Photograph: Tim Atkin MW

In search of cooler conditions, some producers are growing grapes near the coast, and, in Patagonia in the south, near riverbanks. The success of ocean-influenced vineyards in Chapadmalal (Buenos Aires) and San Javier (Río Negro) even led to the planting of a vineyard right on the beach in Bahía Bustamante (Chubut). Patagonia's vineyards now extend as far south as Capitán Sarmiento, in Chubut, at a similar latitude to New Zealand's southernmost vineyard region, Central Otago. Single projects have sprung up in non-viticultural areas all over the country; there are now vineyards in 18 of Argentina's 23 provinces.

Digging deep

As well as planting new vineyards, wine-growers are increasingly analysing the ground beneath their vines. 'For many years we talked about climate and altitude,' explains Sebastián Zuccardi, one of Argentina's most influential winemakers. The realisation that they were working with such varied alluvial soils created the need for a precise understanding of place, and how this translates into each wine. 'What we had previously considered as a single vineyard may today be sub-divided into 35 parcels,' adds Zuccardi.

It is hard to find a vineyard these days that doesn't have at least one *calicata*. These soil pits (pictured left) provide a window into what lies beneath the

surface and are an indispensable tool for terroir-focused wine-growers (while the specific effects of soil on wine are unproven, they are suggested by observation and experience).

Guillermo Corona is a geophysicist working in Mendoza. In 2015 he began studying the Uco Valley soils as a hobby. To date he has identified 40 sub-regions by their geomorphology. 'My intention was simply to provide a framework for growers to understand the variations of where their vines are planted,' explains Corona. Understanding and quantifying these diverse alluvial soils is proving to be key to accurately managing vineyards.

Of particular interest to producers of quality grapes are Argentina's recently discovered calcareous soils – regarded by many as the holy grail of wine-growing. 'The vast majority of Argentina's calcareous soils have been formed in situ by the interaction of native plants and the calcium in soils,' explains Marcelo Belmonte, viticulture director of the Peñaflor Group. The alkalinity of these soils limits the vine's ability to absorb nutrients. This stress, in turn, promotes the production of the components crucial for making high-quality wines: tannin and flavour compounds. Also, in cool climates, the calcium in these soils yields grape juice with good natural acidity, which affects the way we perceive the texture of tannins. Belmonte calls the tannins 'grippy', Zuccardi 'like liquid chalk'. ➤



‘Nowadays, the focus of viticulture here is optimising existing terroirs and exploring new ones’ **Paul Hobbs, Viña Cobos**

In 2013, Paraje Altamira became the first geographical indication (GI) to be classified based on soil, climatic conditions and history, rather than political boundaries. The GI was created following a six-year campaign from a group of local producers who wanted to validate the area’s reputation as one of the top sites of the valley. This marked a new chapter for Argentina’s viticulture: the arrival of the terroir-driven classification. Other Uco Valley districts Los Chacayes, Pampa El Cepillo and San Pablo are part of this new generation of GIs.

Forward thinking

‘Nowadays, the focus of viticulture here is optimising existing terroirs and exploring new ones,’ says renowned American winemaker Paul Hobbs of Viña Cobos. Growers use leading technology to monitor key factors affecting the vines, including high-resolution drone photography, real-time satellite data to control vine vigour and water stress, and 3D soil structure profiling.

I recently visited Gabriel Dvoskin’s 2ha organic vineyard in Pampa El Cepillo, known locally as ‘the fridge’ for its cold temperatures. At one corner of the vineyard there was a giant black curtain. After studying the local geography, Dvoskin identified that cold air causing frost damage in the vineyard was coming



from this particular corner. So he installed a 6m-high, 50m-long curtain to prevent this air from getting to the vines. This is a typical example of the technology, creativity and attention to detail that is having a profound impact on producers’ understanding of their vineyards and on the resulting quality of their wines.

Such attention to detail extends to farming methods. Unthinkable in the 1990s, more than 6,000ha of vineyards in Argentina are now farmed organically, and 300ha biodynamically. Sustainable farming has joined the agenda and many producers strive to make it the norm. In 2013, Bodegas de Argentina (BAAC), an association of 250 wineries, released its Wine & Viticulture Sustainability Protocol, which is tailor-made for Argentina’s local conditions. More than a dozen producers have been certified so far.

Grape diversity

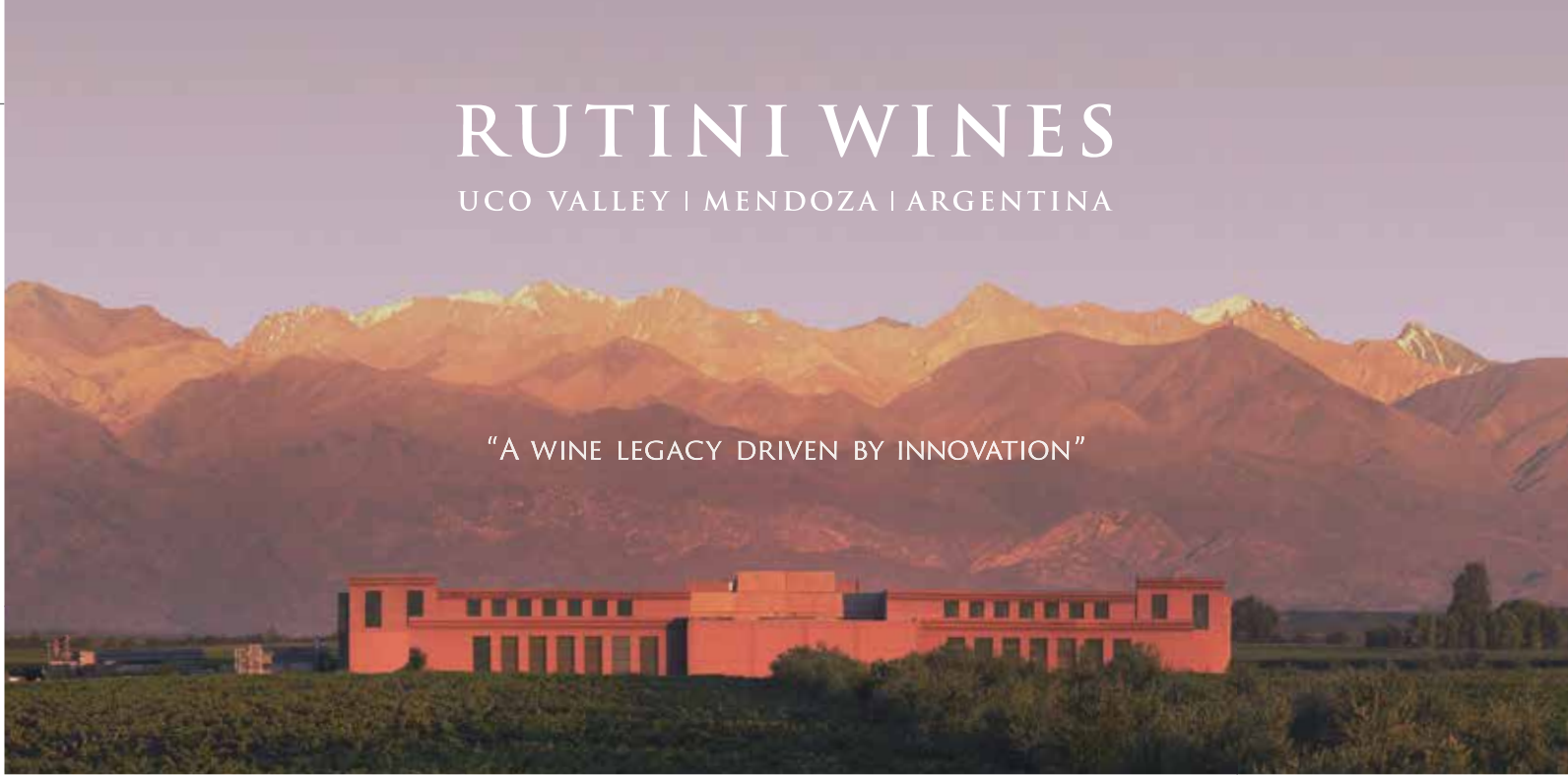
In the past decade our understanding of Malbec has changed at high speed. Continuous research is being done into the variety’s genetic diversity and complexity. New vineyard areas have been developed, old vineyards have been brought back to life and winemakers have taken a step back to allow for better site expression. For Alejandro Vigil, Catena Zapata’s winemaking director and co-owner of Bodega Aleanna, the first step was to stop making Malbecs like Cabernets. ‘We started harvesting Malbec earlier, shortening maceration times and lowering fermentation temperatures,’ he explains. ‘Now, it’s all about finding the grape’s identity and expressing it, linking it to a place: Malbec of Agrelo [in the Luján de Cuyo sub-region], Malbec of La Consulta [Uco Valley], and even down to a specific parcel of a vineyard.’

But Malbec isn’t everything. In their search for authenticity, winemakers are going back to the past. ‘We have gone out looking for old vineyards with varieties planted by Italian and Spanish immigrants more than 100 years ago,’ says Matías Michelini, founder of the Passionate Wine project in Tupungato in the Uco Valley. Grape varieties such as Criolla Chica, Moscatel, Semillon and Bonarda, to name but a few, are enjoying a revival throughout the country.

These join a new wave of Mediterranean varieties including Garnacha, Monastrell (Mourvèdre), Marsanne, Roussanne, Viognier, Mencía, Nebbiolo and Petit Verdot – adding further diversity to the already established Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc.

Argentina’s winemakers are taking great strides in discovering and understanding their land. Today, the focus of quality-minded producers is on site expression rather than the sometimes overworked wines of yesteryear. The result? A new generation of fresh, vibrant and diverse wines showing a sense of place and real excitement. Argentinians have learned that less is more, and to trust the treasure beneath their feet.

Marina Gayan MW is Argentina’s first and only Master of Wine. She was the DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina from 2010 until 2014



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Argentina: my top 25

While Malbec remains Argentina’s flagship variety, winemakers are increasingly producing innovative blends, as well as exploring new varieties and styles. Alejandro Iglesias recommends his favourites

① **Susana Balbo Wines, Susana Balbo Signature White Blend, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2019** 95
£16.95-£20 (2018) **Bottle Apostle, Christopher Piper, Grapevine Wine Services, Hedonism, Hennings, Noble Green, The Whalley Wine Shop, Vegan Wine Box**
A leading light among Argentinian white blends, made with Semillon, Torrontés and Sauvignon Blanc from Paraje Altamira at 1,050m above sea level. With a distinctive combination of mineral notes, hints of white flowers, fresh citrus, pear and green apple over subtle spices, it offers refreshing acidity and a full body. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13%

② **Otronia, III & VI, Patagonia 2017** 94
£60 **Bibendum Wine**
Juan Pablo Murgia and Alberto Antonini produce this exciting white with organic Chardonnay grapes from a Patagonian vineyard located at 45° of latitude to the south. The extreme climate, limestone soils and 16 months in barrel make this a pure, expressive wine with bright fruit, citrus, honey and cinnamon aromas. Long finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.8%

③ **Andeluna, Blanc de Franc, Tupungato, Gualtallary, Uco Valley 2019** 93
£29.99 **Hallgarten & Novum Wines**

Andeluna, a top producer in Gualtallary, has taken the unusual step of producing a 100% Cabernet Franc rosé. Unoaked, this is a pale, Provence-style rosé, expressive with raspberry, redcurrant, strawberry and rose notes. Taut and crisp, with a juicy-fruit palate, it is subtle and elegant. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12.5%

④ **Escorihuela Gascón, MEG, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2018** 96
N/A UK **www.escorihuelagascon.com.ar**
Matías Ciciani Soler knows how to bring out the character of the grapes from El Cepillo (southern Uco). A red blend of Malbec (60%) and Cabernet Sauvignon (40%) – elegantly complex with vibrant red fruits, the mineral personality of the terroir and well-integrated oaky aromas. Juicy and flavoursome with a chalky texture. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.7%

⑤ **Bodegas Bianchi, Enzo Bianchi Gran Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017** 95
£46 **Walker & Wodehouse**
A new luxury Malbec from Bodegas Bianchi made with grapes from Los Chacayes. Aged for 12 months in French oak, this is a lush, vigorous wine that stays true to the stony vineyard soils, offering a mineral profile with crisp red fruits, a chalky texture and refreshing acidity. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%

⑥ **Rutini, Single Vineyard Gualtallary Cabernet Franc, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2016** 95
£45.50 **Wine Direct**
Cabernet Franc wines are the latest jewel in Argentina’s crown. Mariano Di Paola, winemaker at Rutini Wines, is responsible for this refreshing wine from Gualtallary, sourced from a vineyard at 1,300m. It achieves a refined balance between berries and wild herbs, along with gentle spices and toasted hints from the oak ageing. Deliciously rich, with juicy tannins and a long finish. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.6%

⑦ **Trapiche, Terroir Series Finca Coletto Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015** 95
£27.25-£30.99 **Exel, Fareham Wine Cellar, NY Wines of Cambridge, The Fine Wine Co, Vintriloquy, Vinvm**
This is an original Malbec; an exquisite combination of luxury and freshness. The key lies in where it comes from: a 50-year-old vineyard in El Peral, Tupungato, at 1,130m above sea level. The mild climate of the region produces a fruity bouquet of cherries, berries and fresh flowers that continues on the palate, along with a firm, opulent mouthfeel. A rich and eloquent wine. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

⑧ **Zuccardi, Aluvional Paraje Altamira, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015** 95
£65-£75 **Firth & Co, Wine Direct**
Sebastián Zuccardi is an Uco Valley producer and Aluvional is his collection of mountain wines from different terroirs. This Malbec, from Paraje Altamira, is aged in used barrels and concrete vats. It offers a wild profile evoking mountain breezes and herbs. Delivering vibrant red fruits with balsamic hints, in the mouth it is direct and full-bodied with a chalky texture. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%

⑨ **Domaine Bousquet, Ameri Single Vineyard, Tupungato, Gualtallary 2017** 94
£28 **Vintage Roots**
Domaine Bousquet produces wines from its organic vineyards in Gualtallary, Uco Valley, located at 1,100m. This red is the flagship wine, a blend of Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Merlot that spends 16 months in barrel to establish an unusual, refined style. Rich and perfumed, it’s full-bodied but well-balanced with juicy tannins. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14.5%

⑩ **Durigutti Family Winemakers, Proyecto Las Compuertas Cabernet Franc, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2018** 94
N/A UK **www.durigutti.com**
Héctor and Pablo Durigutti are committed to reviving Las Compuertas, a historic terroir of Luján de Cuyo at 1,050m above sea level. This unoaked Cabernet Franc is one of their most recent releases. Violet red in colour with lively red fruit and hints of fresh herbs, it is taut in the mouth with firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.9%

⑪ **Luigi Bosca, DOC Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2018** 94
£16.99 (2017) **Dunell’s, Loki Wine**
A textbook Malbec produced by Luigi Bosca using grapes sourced from an old vineyard in Vistalba, Luján de Cuyo, for the first ever Designation of Origin in South America. Aged for 14 months in French oak, it delivers an intense mix of mature red fruits, violet aromas and oaky spices. Opulent and rich on the palate, with juicy tannins. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%

⑫ **Salentein, Numina Gran Corte, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2016** 94
£21.50 **Exel**
The unusual conditions in 2016 (a cold, rainy year in Mendoza) allowed Salentein winemaker José Galante to create one of his best ever versions of this red blend, combining Malbec, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Petit Verdot. Rich in colour, the wine displays bright red fruit and sweet spice aromas, along with attractive hints of Mediterranean herbs. It’s polished and refined, with mouthwatering acidity. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

⑬ **Trivento, Golden Reserve Malbec, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2017** 94
£16 **Ocado, Tesco, The Pip Stop, Wine Pig**
Germán Di Césare makes this Malbec using grapes from different vineyards in Luján de Cuyo. Faithful to the fruity style he favours, this seductive wine offers aromas of cherry and blueberry in tandem with sweet oaky spices. A typically voluptuous Malbec from the region, it is refreshingly firm with a distinctive, sophisticated profile. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

⑭ **Alta Vista, Terroir Selection Malbec, Mendoza 2017** 93
£17 **Sainsbury’s**
Alta Vista winery is a pioneer in the exploration of Mendoza terroirs. This Malbec, made with grapes from five different vineyards in the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo, is an expressive wine full of fruity character. Blackberry and blueberry notes mingle with slightly toasted aromas and Mediterranean herbs. In the mouth it is vigorous, but balanced, with graceful tannins. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14.5%

⑮ **Colomé, Auténtico Malbec, Calchaquí Valley, Salta 2019** 93
£30.30 (2018) **Liberty Wines, Quality Wines**
Made with grapes from old vineyards surrounding the winery at 2,500m in Salta, this unoaked Malbec is a classic expression of high-altitude terroir. Deeply coloured, it offers black cherry, wild herb and violet aromas, with hints of balsam and ripe figs. Luxurious but juicy mid-palate, with firm acidity and character. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.5%

⑯ **Vistalba, Tomero Reserva Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017** 93
£17.99-£18.50 **All About Wine, Bibendum Wine, The Fine Wine Co**
Bodega Vistalba makes wines from grapes grown in the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo. The Tomero Reserva is one of its classics, a Malbec that combines a traditional character and a nod to modern palates. With a bouquet of black cherry and quince fruit, along with elegant floral aromas and oaky hints, on the palate it is elegant and lively, with a pleasantly lingering finish. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14% ➤



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17 Casarena, Single Vineyard Naoki's Vineyard Malbec, Agrelo, Luján de Cuyo, Mendoza 2017 93

£31 (2014) **Vinatis**
A self-proclaimed guardian of Luján de Cuyo, Casarena specialises in single-vineyard wines from the region. Naoki is an interesting vineyard in Agrelo whose soils have a high limestone content, resulting in an unusual Malbec with a distinctively fruity aroma. Light and taut with a refreshing mouthfeel and firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.5%

18 El Esteco, Old Vines 1958 Criolla, Cafayate, Salta 2018 93

N/A UK **www.elsesteco.com**
Criolla wines are some of the most inspiring bottles being produced in Argentina. Alejandro Pepa was one of the first producers to take an interest in this heritage and rescued an old Criolla vineyard in Cafayate, Salta. Unoaked and fermented with whole bunches, this wine offers fresh strawberry, with floral and leafy hints. Light and crisp on the palate. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14.4%

19 Finca Sopenia, Estate Reserve Malbec, Gualtallary, Uco Valley 2018 93

£13.95-£17.40 **Christopher Piper, Ellis Wines, Quality Wines**
Made by Julia Halupczok from Gualtallary grapes grown at 1,200m in the Uco Valley, this is very recognisably high-altitude Malbec. It offers deep black plum aromas with generous helpings of cherries, blackberries and violets. Lively on the palate, with polished tannins and refreshing acidity, this wine stands out in its price segment. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

20 Pyros Wines, Single Vineyard Block No 4 Malbec, Pedernal Valley, San Juan 2015 93

£29.95-£31 **Via UK agent New Generation**
Located at 1,400m in the province of San Juan, the Pedernal Valley has become an exciting terroir to explore. The vines grow in a mild, sunny climate in flinty limestone soils, resulting in wines like this, which combines herbal aromas with earthy, mineral flavours, cassis and cherries. Dense in the mouth, it offers excellent freshness and a chalky texture. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

21 Altocedro, Año Cero Malbec, La Consulta, Uco Valley 2019 92

£13-£16 (2018) **House of Townend, Noble Grape, Taste Argentina, The Good Wine Shop, Vinos Latinos**
Karim Mussi's entry-level Malbec is a very pure expression of La Consulta, a traditional wine region in the Uco Valley. This is a simple wine with red fruits and floral notes that temper the smokiness of the oak. In the mouth it's taut, savoury and fresh. A versatile food wine that can accompany a wide range of dishes. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14.2%

22 Clos de los Siete, Vista Flores, Uco Valley, 2017 92

£14.50-£17.50 **Champagnes & Châteaux, Sainsbury's**
The 15th vintage of this wine made by Michel Rolland. Grown at 1,100m, it's an intense and refreshing blend of Malbec, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Petit Verdot and Cabernet Franc. Aged in French oak, it delivers ripe red fruits, dried herbs and smoky notes. Rich structure, well-defined acidity and firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

23 Diamandes de Uco, Grande Reserve, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2015 92

N/A UK **www.diamandes.com**
The Bonnie family, who own Château Malartic-Lagravière in Pessac-Léognan, make this assemblage of 75% Malbec and 25% Cabernet Sauvignon in the Uco Valley, in a recognisably Bordeaux style. Aged for 18 months in French oak, this is a lively wine in which Malbec dominates with its aromas of violets, ripe red fruit, redcurrant, cinnamon and vanilla. Mild, well-balanced and full-bodied, with firm tannins. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%

24 La Celia, Pioneer Cabernet Franc, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017 92

N/A UK **www.lacelia.com.ar**
In Argentina, Cabernet Franc tends to be fairly expensive, but a few good, reasonably priced examples can still be found, and this is one of them. Produced with grapes from La Consulta in the Uco Valley, it is made in a fruit-forward style, showing hints of Mediterranean herbs and smoky aromas. On the palate it is juicy in character with gentle tannins. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

25 Monteviejo, Petite Fleur Malbec, Uco Valley, Mendoza 2017 92

N/A UK **www.monteviejo.com.ar**
Marcelo Pelleriti makes Petit Fleur Malbec, Bodega Monteviejo's entry-level offering, using grapes from the Uco Valley. A typical example of high-altitude wine, it combines red fruits and wild herbs with subtle toasted notes that underscore the fruity flavours. Medium-bodied, it offers lush tannins and a mineral finish. Excellent value for money. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



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Argentina for wine tourists

With a bit of careful planning – and armed with this guide to where to go and what to see – it's possible to get a taste of everything Argentina's wine country has to offer

Argentina wine country has never been a more attractive destination. With wine styles moulded by the high altitudes, a little tradition and plenty of modern ingenuity, it's no wonder that 1.2 million travellers a year come to see the country's vineyards, set against the craggy dramatic skyline of the Andes.

Offering a unique mixture of luxury, architecture and Latin American culture, the vineyards of Argentina require a little effort to visit but they repay the investment in spades. Organisation is key: crossing the wine country in its entirety is the equivalent of travelling from Edinburgh to Morocco, so it's important to do a little research and choose your destinations carefully.

AROUND MENDOZA

Located 987km west of Buenos Aires, the province of Mendoza accounts for 70% of the wine produced in Argentina. The region boasts 153,000ha of vineyards and 625 wineries, of which 146 offer hospitality services and activities. Of its three sub-regions, the Primera Zona to the north and the Uco Valley to the south can be easily visited in a day trip from the eponymous capital city, with vineyards located from 30km to 130km away. It is essential either to rent a car or book your travel through an agency.

Luján de Cuyo & Maipú

The Primera Zona is made up of two districts that border Mendoza City: Luján

de Cuyo and Maipú. These districts have formed the heart of wine country in Argentina since the 19th century, when Malbec first found a home here.

Against a backdrop of long rows of cottonwoods, the region offers a mixture of traditional and modern culture. A pair of wineries – Alta Vista and Trivento – are good examples of each, respectively. **Alta Vista** (www.altavistawines.com), built in 1890 and owned by the D'Aulan family since 1998, is a refurbished winery that today sits next to residential areas and has an olive garden suitable for picnics or a traditional *asado* barbecue.

Trivento (www.trivento.com), 10km east, is a more hi-tech winery. It even has an art museum on site, which is well worth a visit before you take a tour of the

'Luján de Cuyo and Maipú have formed the heart of wine country in Argentina since the 19th century, when Malbec found a home here'

neighbouring vineyard by bicycle. And if you're stopping here for lunch, the winery restaurant serves tapas.

It is across the Mendoza river (4km south), however, that you can really get a feel for how Argentina's wine industry has developed in recent times. Agrelo, a sub-district of Luján de Cuyo, boasts more than 100 wineries, all established after 1990. Make your first stop **Susana Balbo Wines** (www.susanabalbowines.com.ar), which has just celebrated its 20th anniversary. Taste wines from the local terroir before enjoying a five-course lunch at *Osadia de Crear* tapas restaurant.

About 15 minutes' drive south brings you to **Bodega Budeguer** (www.budeguer.com). This pretty family winery opened in 2012 and has now become a hot spot for wine lovers looking to head off the beaten track. View the Virgen de la Carrodilla chapel (designed by Mendoza architect Gonzalo Merlo) before enjoying an exclusive wine tasting.

Your third stop in Agrelo, **Pulenta Estate** (www.pulentaestate.com), is about five minutes' drive to the

southwest, and can be identified by the row of olive trees that line the entrance. The winery, which offers regular scheduled tours, belongs to an historic fourth-generation wine family, whose cellars also contain the odd classic Porsche.

Uco Valley

Drive south on Ruta 40 and you'll come to the Uco Valley (about an hour from Mendoza City). Casa de Uco and Alpasión Wine, Lodge & Vineyards are both located in the new Los Chacayes GI (geographical indication) and make an excellent base from which to explore the area on a one- or two-day tour. **Casa de Uco** (www.casadeuco.com) is a luxury hotel designed by the architect Juan Tonconogy. If you can't stay overnight, a day visit includes a tour of the 'telescopic' winery, while the restaurant serves food made from ingredients produced on the estate. Horseriding treks through the mountains are also on offer.

Alpasión Lodge (www.alpasion.com) is a warm and welcoming inn that's suitable either for a lunchtime visit or >

Mendoza: where to stay

CITY CENTRE

Amérian Executive Mendoza Hotel An elegant four-star hotel overlooking Plaza Italia, with an outdoor pool and a sun deck. www.amerian.com

Diplomatic A five-star hotel that's close to shops and museums, with views of the Andes mountains from all rooms. www.diplomatichotel.com.ar

Park Hyatt An imposing central hotel opposite the historic Plaza Independencia, with an outdoor pool and a casino. www.mendoza.park.hyatt.com

Sheraton Mendoza Hotel A modern hotel featuring an indoor pool and a restaurant that offers panoramic views of downtown Mendoza and the Andes mountains. www.sheratonmendozahotel.com-mendoza.com

OUTSIDE THE CITY

Alpasión Lodge Cosy, six-room accommodation in the Uco Valley offering a pool and a roof terrace with dramatic mountain views. www.alpasion.com

Casa de Uco Set in the Andes foothills, this contemporary Uco Valley hotel has been designed to blend in with its breathtaking surroundings. www.casadeuco.com

Entre Cielos Mendoza This modern boutique hotel in Luján de Cuyo has an outdoor pool and duplex suites with private terraces overlooking the vineyards. www.entrecielos.com

Below: horseriding at Casa de Uco



TRIVENTO ARGENTINA

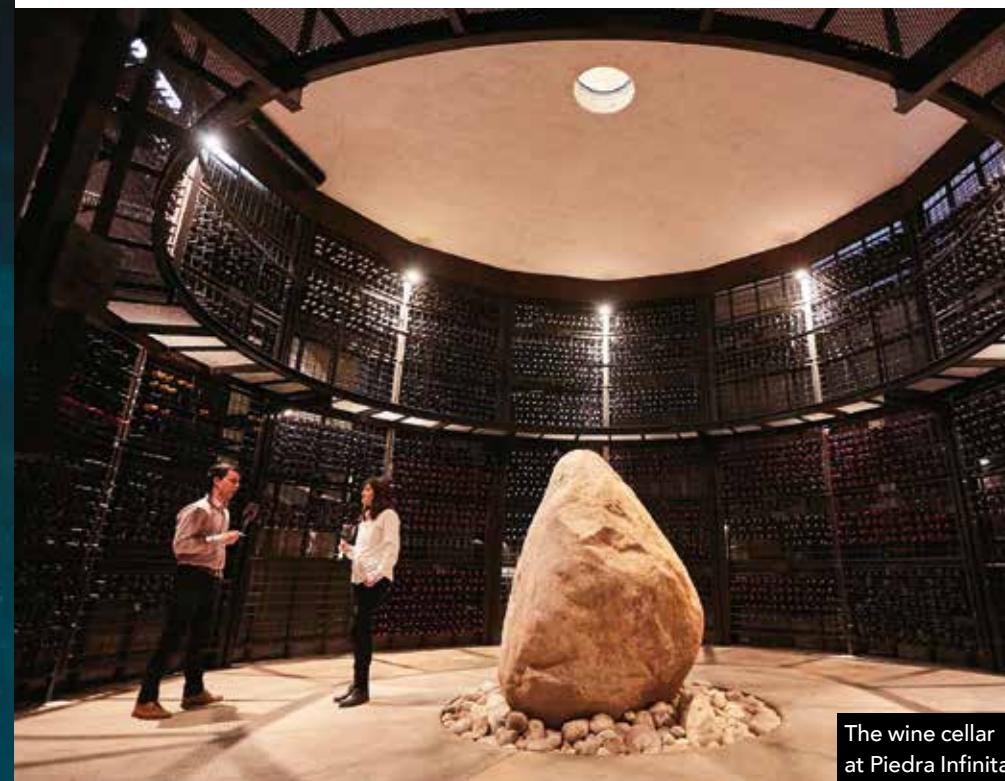


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The wine cellar
at Piedra Infinita

an overnight stay. The restaurant serves Argentinian cuisine, including llama meat, paired with wines from the vineyard.

From there, it's a 30-minute drive to **DiamAndes** (www.diamandes.com) in Vista Flores. The winery is part of Clos de los Siete – Michel Rolland's wine project – and is owned by the Bordelais Bonnie family. A visit here is a fascinating architectural experience. Make time to stop at Diam's Bistrot & Bar à Vin for a glass of wine on the terrace.

About 20km south is another new GI: Paraje Altamira. **Familia Zuccardi** (www.zuccardiwines.com) has built its striking Valle de Uco winery here. Designed by Fernando Raganato, the concrete structure features a copper dome and specially designed tanks and circulation spaces. While the architecture is the main attraction, the winery's Piedra Infinita restaurant is also well worth a visit.

Heading 45km north again, your next stop will be at Bodegas Salentein (www.bodegasalentein.com), designed by

How to get there

Flights from the UK to Buenos Aires take just under 14 hours (daily flights from Heathrow with British Airways). It takes 1 hour 50 minutes to fly from Buenos Aires to Mendoza (12 daily flights) and 2 hours 45 minutes from Buenos Aires to Salta (four daily flights). There is also one direct daily flight between Mendoza and Salta, which takes 2 hours 15 minutes.

Bórmida & Yanzón. The estate is also home to the Killka visitor centre, with its art museum containing part of winery owner Mijndert Pon's personal collection and an elegant chapel. If you're looking for a cosy place to sleep among the vines, the guesthouse here is very alluring.

Nearby, the flagstone-roofed **Bodega Atamisque** (www.atamisque.com) is located on the border between the Uco Valley and Luján de Cuyo. Surrounded by one of the region's prettiest estates, the vineyards adjoin groves of walnut, cherry and peach trees, as well as a trout farm supplying the restaurant. Allow half a day to visit the winery and estate, then spend the night in one of the lodges or have lunch at the restaurant. ➤

Eating, drinking and shopping in Mendoza City

Winery restaurants are an excellent option for lunch while you're staying in Mendoza City. **Azafrán** (www.azafranresto.com), **Maria Antonieta** (www.mariaantonietaresto.com) and **Anna Bistró** (www.annabistro.com) are among the best on offer.

At night, a meal at the lively **Fuente y Fonda** (www.fuenteyfonda.com.ar) is a good option for groups, while those seeking a more sophisticated atmosphere should head to **Orégano** (www.restauranteoregano.com), **Josefina Restó** (www.josefinaresto.com.ar) or **Siete Cocinas** (www.sietecocinas.com.ar).

If the plan is to drink plenty of wine or buy bottles to take home,



Azafrán

Cabrera Charif Wine House (www.cabreracharif.com) on Avenida Aristides Villanueva is worth a visit. Said avenue boasts a bustling nightlife,



full of pubs, bars and eateries. Mendoza also has a burgeoning craft beer scene, with **Chachingo Craft Beer** (@chachingo.aristides),

Antares (@antares.mendoza) and **Hangar 52** (@hangar52mza) all offering a good range. For cocktail lovers, the popular **Gingger** (www.ginggerbar.com) has an excellent list.

There are two main shopping areas in Mendoza: the pedestrianised city centre and **Palmares Open Mall** (www.palmares.com.ar). Recently opened in the Maipú district, the gourmet market **Il Mercato** (www.ilmercato.com.ar) is a 25-minute drive away.



Bodega Colomé

SKIES OF SALTA

The province of Salta lies in the far north of Argentina, on the Tropic of Capricorn. Amid a breathtaking landscape of deserts and ravines, cacti grow building-high and the sky is an extraordinarily pure blue: it's here that Salta's Calchaquí Valley produces a range of unique wines. It is important to bear in mind that it takes at least three hours to get from Salta airport to the local wineries, as the surroundings shift upwards from jungle to a more lunar landscape.

Your first stop is the sleepy little town of Cafayate. At its entrance is **Bodega El Esteco** (www.elesteco.com), where you can experience both the past and present of the Calchaquí Valley. A visit to the old, colonial-style bell tower – built in 1892 – gives a good idea of its remote location. The winery provides tastings and tours of the vineyard (advance reservation required). Heading north into the Calchaquí Valley, drive for at least two hours along winding mountain roads – it's an arduous

journey, but it's well worth it – and you'll arrive at **Bodega Colomé** (www.bodegacolome.com). Set in a remote, extraordinary landscape amid the peace and quiet of its 1,600m-high slopes, Colomé offers wine tastings, austere but well-appointed accommodation and absolute tranquility. Spend the night at the lodge after visiting the winery and the onsite James Turrell Museum, which is home to nine immersive light installations by this celebrated light and space artist.

Salta: where to stay

IN CAFAYATE
Grace Cafayate This boutique spa hotel just south of the town centre is set in La Estancia de Cafayate residential and sporting estate, featuring vineyards, equestrianism and a golf course. www.graceargentina.com.ar

Patios de Cafayate Part of the El Esteco wine estate, this colonial-style hotel is set in the original estate farmstead, which dates back to 1892. www.patiosdecafayate.com

Viñas de Cafayate Just west of the town centre, this Mediterranean-style wine resort is set in vineyards and offers wine tastings and an outdoor pool. www.cafayatewineresort.com

Grace Cafayate

IN THE VALLEYS
Estancia Colomé Colonial-style lodging in a remote location, with an outdoor pool, a unique light museum and magnificent mountain views. www.bodegacolome.com

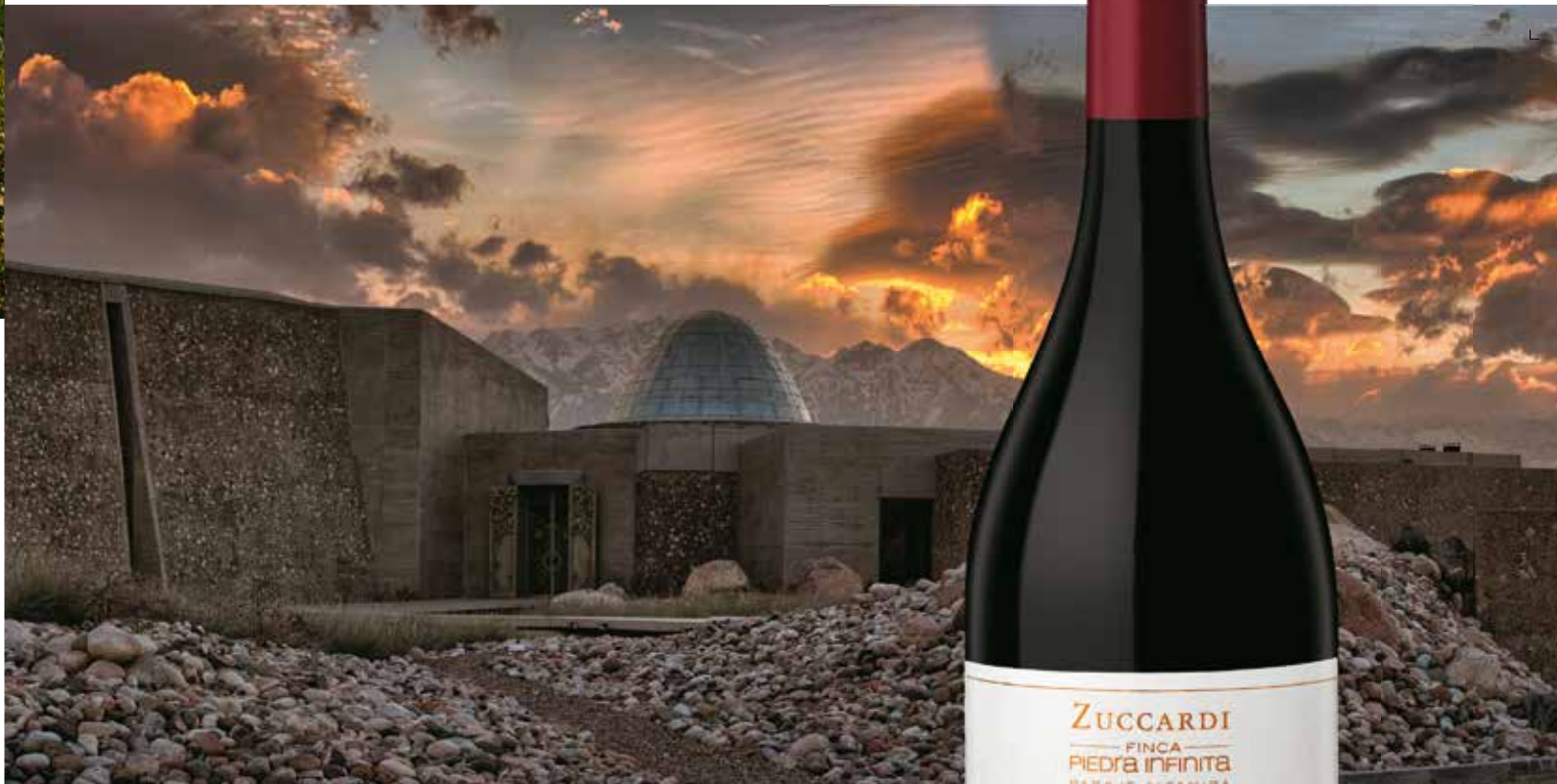
Finca El Carmen A cosy and laid-back guesthouse in Angastaco offering valley views, an outdoor pool and a museum. www.vallesdelcarmen.com.ar

Hacienda de Molinos A refurbished 18th-century hacienda that makes a tranquil stop-off on any Argentinian wine tour, boasting a swimming pool and a terrace with mountain views. www.haciendademolinos.com.ar

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Issue 245 End of October 2019

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FORGING THE PATH OF ARGENTINE WINEMAKING SINCE 1883



Understanding Uruguay

Despite its long wine heritage, Uruguay has been slow to win the global recognition it deserves. But as producers make viticultural advances and explore new terroirs, this is beginning to change. Patricio Tapia reports



Bodega Bouza vineyard at the foot of Pan de Azúcar



Javier Carrau

Tango offers some of the most beautiful but also the saddest lyrics in the world of music. Disenchantment, loneliness, nostalgia, all surrounded by a halo of melancholy that makes tango a pleasure, but a rather guilty one.

There are many voices of tango, but without a doubt the most famous, the 'Elvis' of tango, is Carlos Gardel. The impeccable look, the perfect hairstyle, the cross-lapel jacket, the polished shiny shoes, the bright eyes and his raspy but sweet voice, singing the classic tangos that made a generation of South Americans sigh.

Gardel was a naturalised citizen of Argentina, but he claimed to be Uruguayan by birth (although there is evidence to suggest that he was actually born in Toulouse, France). He certainly fits the mould of a Uruguayan. While generalisations can be tedious, especially when it comes to defining the people of a particular country, Uruguayans seem to display a certain melancholy in their way of being, in their way of seeing life.

That was one of the things that most caught my attention when I first visited Uruguay, in early 2000. Under the shadow of the Chilean wine boom and the incipient growth of Argentinian wine, the melancholy of the Uruguayans translated into a certain resignation at not being able to compete with those new wines, but also some mistrust when showing their wines, as if what they did was not up to the same standard as their neighbours. Today that has changed, and has changed radically, especially

'Uruguayans have realised that what they have has very little to do with what is done elsewhere in South America'

since Uruguayans seem to have realised that what they have is not only of good quality, but also has very little to do with what is done elsewhere in South America.

Climatic conditions

Uruguay looks towards the Atlantic and a large part of its territory, in the northwest, flanks the mighty Río de la Plata. Both bodies of water play a very important role in the climate of the viticultural areas, which are humid, but at the same time have moderate temperatures, never reaching the heat levels of Mendoza in Argentina, or the Central Valley in Chile.

It is these conditions which have made Tannat the star grape of Uruguay. Imported for the first time in 1870 from the southwest of France by the Basque Pascual Harriague, Tannat has a firm, thick skin strong enough to prevent the rot of grapes under the heavy Atlantic rains. Thanks to viticultural advances, the diversity of wine grapes in Uruguay is today relatively wide, but in those first years of trial and error it was Tannat that survived. Today it is still the country's ➤



The Arizus are pioneers in Mendoza's winemaking history. They have consistently worked to achieve the ultimate expression of Argentine wine. They recognise that they have been blessed with a privileged terroir where soil, climate and plant varieties find the perfect combination.

The harmony of these elements together with the study of the environment, and of each plot where the vineyards are planted, allow Luigi Bosca to obtain unique wines, full of character and personality.

The different collections of wines from Luigi Bosca find success throughout the world for their authenticity and elegance. In constant search of terroirs that give the grapes unique character, Luigi Bosca have launched wines made from specific regions that depict a true sense of place.

Luigi Bosca has become the paradigm of an Argentine brand not only for the consistency in quality and hard work, but also because it has created a lasting bond with the terroir, knowing what to expect and how to bring the best of the land.



Tannat

'Granitic soils and the strong influence of the sea have served to uncover a more fruity and friendly face of Tannat'

most-planted variety, accounting for 1,600ha of the 6,000ha of land under vine.

Many of those hectares of Tannat are concentrated in Canelones, the country's most-planted region, accounting for more than 60% of its production. The reason for this concentration is its proximity to Uruguay's capital, Montevideo, which has always been the main market for Uruguayan wines. Annual consumption in Uruguay is 27 litres per capita – the highest of any South American country.

Soil types

The soft hills of Canelones combined with the region's clay and limestone soils produce a Tannat that is austere in aroma but has a great intensity of textures, such as those obtained in Las Violetas, one of Uruguay's top viticultural areas. 'The soils in Las Violetas are very fertile: production must be controlled to obtain ripe grapes and soft tannins,' says Javier Carrau of Bodegas Carrau, one of the main promoters of Tannat in Uruguay. 'Under those conditions you get reds with an intense colour and very rich fruit flavours.'

The Tannat of Canelones could be considered a classic Uruguayan style. ➤

Paul Hobbs: a 'gringo' winemaker in Uruguay

American consultant winemaker Paul Hobbs has been visiting Uruguay since the early 1990s. Today, he is a consultant for the Deicas family projects, one of the most dynamic forces on the new Uruguayan scene.

What are the differences between viticulture in Uruguay and the rest of South America?

Everything. Mainly because the climate here is majorly different relative to any of the well-known wine regions of Argentina or Chile – it's drier and warmer. Climate impacts the entire biosphere, so the soils are unique too. Viticulturally speaking, it's unlike any other place on the continent.

How have Uruguay's wines developed since your first visit?

Fast. In the 1990s I was struck by how backwards the industry was – it made Argentina look positively space age. There was an intense, driving will to improve, but we were racked by where to get the money to finance these capital-intensive dreams. Today, I can only speculate on how they did it, but when I returned 17 years later to work with Deicas, I really could not believe my eyes. Certainly it didn't hurt that deep-pocketed foreign investments were made – for example at Garzón – but Deicas and others had advanced in major ways as well.

You've worked in numerous vineyards throughout Uruguay. Which area has provided you with the most satisfaction?

Of the Deicas holdings, which are diverse and extensive, ironically one of my favourites is its home vineyard in Canelones. I didn't expect much from the relatively heavy clay soils, but I was wrong. I found energy, vitality, freshness and finesse.

Tannat is considered Uruguay's unique selling point, but is there another grape that has potential?

The short answer is that we don't really have a handle on this yet, but we are working hard on it. Several white classical varietals certainly excel, while some rarified varieties such as Petit Manseng can be very good. Merlot, Marselan and Cabernet Franc all show promise.

What are the major challenges for Uruguay?

There are major challenges to making great wine anywhere. Years ago, economic factors and climate would have been my answer. Today, I don't see either of those as concerns. For Uruguayan producers it strikes me that the next big hurdle is gaining international awareness and being accorded due respect for the beautiful wines they are making.



Paul Hobbs





Los Cerros de San Juan, Colonia

With firm tannins, great structure and concentration it can be compared to a Romanesque church, with the same austerity and those thick walls.

In contrast, newer styles of Tannat are beginning to appear in regions towards the east, in Maldonado Bay, facing the Atlantic Ocean. This area has only been planted since the beginning of this century, but during the past five years it has demonstrated that it has much to contribute to the diversity of Uruguay's wine scene.

The topography of Maldonado is made up of gentle slopes that gradually slide to the Atlantic. The influence of the ocean is felt in constant winds, which help control humidity, while granite soils have low fertility and good drainage – the latter particularly important in a country where it rains a lot.

According to Alberto Antonini, Italian winemaker and adviser at Bodega Garzón, one of the main recent forces in Uruguayan wine: 'Due to its terroir, Garzón's Tannat is juicy, vibrant and acidic, with bright black fruit. [It is] more textural and less concentrated than the examples from Canelones, with a deep and smooth reactive tannin.'

Galician accent

In fact, those granitic soils and the strong influence of the sea have not only served to uncover a more fruity and friendly face of Tannat, but also to produce very good wines from other grapes. Red varieties to look out for are Cabernet Franc and Syrah, while for whites there are very good Chardonnays and Sauvignon Blancs. The new white star of Uruguay, however, is Maldonado's Albariño, especially those made by Garzón, Bodega Océanica and the pioneer of the grape in Uruguay, Bodega Bouza.

'The conditions in this area are similar to those found in Galicia: humidity, and granite soils. That is why I think we have obtained good results with this grape,' says Juan Bouza about his perfumed and deliciously refreshing Albariño de Maldonado. It is an ideal white to drink on the beaches of Punta del Este, one of the most famous spots in South America and the gateway to this new wine region.

The Maldonado area represents a new face of Uruguay, but this is a country with a long wine heritage. Colonia, in the southwest, for example, is home to the oldest winery in Uruguay, Los Cerros de San Juan, founded more than 160 years ago. Colonia is the second most-planted

region, with about 1,100ha of vineyards, and it is here that Uruguay's first Sauvignon Blancs were made, influenced by its proximity to the Río de la Plata. Today the fresh, herbal style of these Sauvignons continues, but the region also produces firm, tense Tannats.

The recent history of Uruguayan wine has had its ups and downs. Until very recently, and perhaps wanting to imitate the success of Argentinian Malbec, producers tried to make their Tannat with a similar silkiness, a similarly charming, enveloping character – something that Malbec has to spare. But Tannat is the opposite of that style. By researching more in the vineyard and exploring new terroirs, today's producers are managing to find a truer personality for Tannat; and at the same time they are discovering new grapes and new flavours in this small but dynamic South American wine-producing country.

Today, there is a growing confidence among Uruguay's winemakers – and they are right to be proud of their wines.

Patricio Tapia is a regular Decanter contributor and the author of the annual Descorchados guide to the wines of South America

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Sustainable Uruguay

Producers in this verdant country have embraced eco-friendly methods across all aspects of their winemaking, from the vineyards to packaging, discovers Amanda Barnes

With a maritime climate much like that of Bordeaux, the grass is certainly greener in Uruguay than in the arid wine regions of nearby Argentina and Chile. But while the grass may be greener, managing that grass – between the vines at least – is certainly harder. Indeed Uruguay has the most labour-intensive climate of all South American wine regions.

‘Uruguay has a much more temperate climate, and high rainfall,’ explains flying winemaker Duncan Killiner, who has been making wine in South America for 25 years. ‘There’s much more disease pressure in Uruguay and, as a lot of the viticultural work has to be done by hand, the labour costs increase four-fold when compared to the rest of the New World. Hence the extra love in each bottle of Uruguayan wine costs a little more!’

The maritime climate is what makes Uruguay’s wines so distinctive in South America: delicately aromatic, fresh and balanced. But the changeable climate also means Uruguay’s wine-growers have to work much harder to strike a balance between effective, efficient and ecologically sensitive viticulture. Despite the challenges, sustainable viticulture is firmly on the agenda in Uruguay – at both a local and national level.

Biodiversity matters at Cerro Chapeu in northern Uruguay

A strict code

Uruguay’s wine producers have been using integrated farming techniques widely for decades, and a new association set up last year put into action a three-year sustainability programme and certification. ‘We already have 34 producers and 642ha in the programme for this first year,’ says Bettina Bértola from the National Viticulture Institute, on a number that already represents more than 10% of the country’s production. ‘And there are many producers interested in joining next year,’ she adds.

The sustainability qualification is being developed in conjunction with producers to create a strict code focused on sustainable and ecological production of high-quality wine grapes. ‘This new certification will limit use of some agrochemicals and eliminate many altogether,’ explains Sebastian Ariano, fourth-generation winemaker at Ariano Hermanos winery. ‘But beyond this certification, we’ve always thought of wine grapes as a sustainable crop. This year, our winery celebrated 90 years as a company, and sustaining the business for future generations has always been the focus.’

Family winery Giménez Méndez has also been focusing on integrated farming for multiple generations. ‘Sixty years ago we started talking about the negative effects of conventional agriculture on the environment,’ explains export manager Sebastián Pedreira, ‘and since then we’ve been moving towards the more sustainable alternatives available through integrated farming and organic production – for the benefit of the environment and human health.’

Focus on biodiversity

Many Uruguayan wine-growers feel that caring for their vineyards runs in their blood. ‘On the vineyard we have always been 99% organic,’ explains Daniel Pisano, the fourth generation of his family to make wine in Canelones. ‘We were born and live in the midst of our vineyards, so we are very conscious of having a healthy place to live and work.’

In recent years, like many wine families in Uruguay, the Pisano family has prioritised biodiversity in its vineyards. This has meant cutting out herbicides entirely, even in the rich, fertile clay soils of Canelones and Montevideo.



Narbona



Pablo Fallabrino

‘Since 2006 we’ve been working in our Montevideo vineyard without herbicides, simply using machines to control the grass growth,’ explains Marcos Carrau, 10th generation at Bodegas Carrau. ‘By leaving the wild grass, we see a greater diversity of vegetation and microflora, which is beneficial for the soil and the plant.’

Cerro Chapeu in northern Uruguay is another winery focused on using the natural biodiversity of their site to aid viticulture. ‘We’ve been using native yeasts for our wine ferments since 1988,’ explains export manager Pia Carrau, ‘and we also apply these native yeasts in the vineyard – they effectively work as a fungicide.’

Maintaining the natural characteristics of the site is also a top priority for Narbona winery in Carmelo. ‘We are working with minimum intervention in order to revalue the region and its very specific characteristics,’ explains winemaker Valeria Chiola, who feels less intervention in the soil helps the terroir translate better to the wines.

Many wineries, including Narbona, Toscanini Wines, Varela Zarranz and one of the country’s largest producers, Establecimiento Juanicó, have been trialling organic viticulture – and in some

cases organic practices have also filtered into the winery. ‘We’ve been reducing the use of sulphur dioxide each vintage,’ says Juanicó winemaker and third-generation owner Santiago Deicas. ‘We are using three times less than we did 10 years ago. This includes making some natural wines under our Bizarra label.’

Minimal intervention

Pablo Fallabrino of Viñedo de los Vientos is also a champion of low- to no-sulphur winemaking. ‘My philosophy is to produce grapes with minimal intervention from chemical products, in a balanced ecosystem – and in the winery we’ve also been on a path towards minimal intervention,’ he explains from his winery in Canelones, just 4km from the coast. ‘Although Uruguay is humid and we have problems with downy mildew, we don’t have any problems with oidium – so we don’t need to use any sulphur treatments. This is an advantage we have compared to the other dry regions in the New World, which have to apply tons of sulphur per hectare. This sulphur is a petrol derivative, so it’s not at all ecological.’

Fallabrino’s major initiatives in the winery include native yeast ferments, using no added sulphites or enzymes, and reusing barrels for up to 15 years. Fallabrino says the changes have been doubly beneficial: ‘We are now producing wines with more personality – and much healthier wines.’

A neighbouring winery, Bracco Bosca, focuses on the most ecologically sensitive way for the grapes to reach not only the winery, but also the consumer. ‘We’ve been using ecological bottles ➤




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Bodega Garzón

‘I felt we had the responsibility to construct something that would protect the purity of the surrounding land and wildlife’

Alejandro Bulgheroni, Bodega Garzón

made from recycled glass for the past three years,’ explains owner Fabiana Bracco. ‘We also recycle the cardboard wine boxes with local customers. At first, people were a bit uncomfortable receiving boxes that had been used before, but now they understand the ecological impact and love it.’

Ecological bottles and packaging are being adopted widely in Uruguay, and wineries including Antigua Bodega, Familia Dardanelli and Familia Traversa have also made the transition from traditional heavy bottles to lighter, ecologically friendly bottles.

Forward thinking

A recent explosion of new producers in Uruguay’s coastal Maldonado region has also made sustainability a focal point. Bodega Garzón, established in 2016 by Argentine billionaire Alejandro Bulgheroni, became the first 100% LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Silver-certified winery outside North America last year.

‘I felt we had the responsibility to construct something that would protect the purity of the surrounding land and wildlife,’ explains Bulgheroni. ‘I’m extremely proud of my team for setting a new benchmark in the wine industry for sustainable design.’ Every installation and building has LEED Silver certification, from the innovative waste-water system

to the ‘living roof’ featuring 70,000 plants – the largest in Latin America.

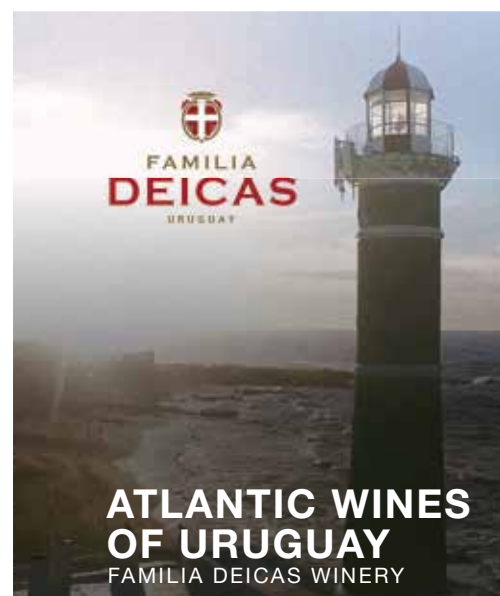
Viña Edén, also in Maldonado, was designed in 2009 to not only recycle water but to generate its own electricity from wind turbines and solar panels in the vineyard, which in fact supplies double the electricity it needs. ‘The excess energy we generate goes into the local power grid for the nearby villages,’ explains owner Mauricio Zlatkin. ‘Our ethos is to have a positive environmental impact on the region.’

New Maldonado wineries such as Viña Edén, Garzón and Bodega Oceánica José Ignacio have also had a positive economic impact, creating a new tourism industry that has provided hundreds of jobs for locals and revived local artisan traditions.

Historic wineries are also planting anew, with an eye for grape varieties that are sustainable for the future. ‘Marselan has great characteristics for sustainable viticulture in Uruguay,’ explains Varela Zarranz winemaker Santiago Degásperi. ‘Its thick skin protects the berries from splitting in the rain, and we can work the vineyard organically and biodynamically. Its naturally high acidity also makes it more stable in the winery – so we aren’t adding any sulphur to the wine at all.’

As Uruguay’s producers continue to explore more sustainable vineyard and winery practices, the emphasis grows on respecting not only the environment of today, but that of tomorrow. ‘We work with techniques that respect the harmony of our natural environment,’ explains Florentina Casao from El Capricho in Durazno. ‘We do it for our land, for us and for the generations to come.’

Amanda Barnes is a wine and travel writer who has been based in South America since 2009. She is the author of the *South America Wine Guide*



Atlántico Sur Wine by Familia Deicas.



Fernando Deicas President of Familia Deicas Winery and Santiago Deicas third generation and Winemaker.

He explains: “Like winemakers planting in high altitudes, we are farming on the coast, searching for cooler weather. Wines from these regions reflect the uniqueness of the place, expressing more diversity when you have different soils. I think the Atlantic Ocean is what gives identity to Uruguayan wines, even more so than Tannat.”

Atlantic wines can be either modern, bright and full of energy such as in Galicia, Portugal and New York or can age gorgeously like in Bordeaux. Familia Deicas is making top-notch vanguard wines, notably the Extreme Vineyards or Massimo Deicas, and is also known for its iconic aging wine Preludio, which can be enjoyed 25 years after harvest.

Micro terroir in Jose Ignacio, region of Maldonado



Coastal influence has a great impact in winemaking. There are many attributes that affect the style of wines, and Uruguay, by having coastal proximity to the Atlantic Ocean is naturally gifted to producing high quality wines. If we have to highlight one of the main aspects of coastal influence, it would be the overall lower temperatures during the ripening of the grapes.

During this stage, days are usually mild to hot reaching up to 32°C or 90°F; however, at night these temperatures decrease substantially to around 10°C or 50°F. This is the result of the sea

breeze, the natural cooling effect of the ocean. These characteristics allow for a balanced ripening profile of flavours and tannins, while naturally achieving refreshing acidity. Familia Deicas Winery has been the pioneer of Atlantic Wines in Uruguay.

With vineyards in twelve terroirs in different regions of Uruguay close to the Atlantic Ocean, including in the Garzon region of Maldonado, Cerro de Guazuvira in Lavalleja, and other micro terroirs in Rocha and Maldonado, Familia Deicas has vast experience farming oceanic vineyards. Santiago Deicas, third generation of the family and winemaker, has been specializing in finding terroirs close to the shore.



Viña Edén

Sustainable Uruguay: Barnes shares her top 12 wine recommendations

- ① **Cerro del Toro, Albariño, Maldonado 2019** 91
N/A UK www.cerrodeltoro.uy
This new hillside coastal vineyard shows great promise from its debut vintage of Albariño. Juicy peach aromas lead into a lively wine with a tangy, saline finish that leaves you dreaming of the sea. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12%
- ② **Bracco Bosca, Ombú Moscatel, Canelones 2018** 90
£14.49 **Latin Wines Online**
Fabiana Bracco is on a mission to revalue her old vines. Her Moscatel and Ugni Blanc blend is scented with citrus and white blossom. This is a crisp, sea-salt fresh wine; ideal for sushi on the beach. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12%
- El Capricho, Verdejo, Durazno 2019** 89
N/A UK www.elcaprichowinery.com
One of the few producers in the inland Durazno region, El Capricho also pioneered the Verdejo grape. This lemon-scented, steely white shows classic fennel and pink grapefruit aromas, with a fresh finish. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 12%
- ③ **Bodega Oceánica José Ignacio, Pinot Rosé, Maldonado 2019** 92
N/A UK www.ojosegnacio.com
Mouthwatering Pinot Noir rosé from this new coastal vineyard located just 10km from the sea. Precision, purity and pink pleasure guided by the hand of renowned winemaker Hans Vinding-Diers. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12.5%
- Viña Progreso, Underground Barrel-less Tannat, Canelones 2019** 94
£25-£28 **Drinkmonger, House of Townend**
Unoaked and sulphite-free: this is the bold approach of one of Uruguay's most promising young winemakers, Gabriel Pisano. This sumptuous Tannat reveals elegant, silky tannins on the palate and a rich perfume of berries and violets. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%
- ④ **Alto de la Ballena, Reserva Tannat-Viognier, Maldonado 2015** 93
£23.62 (2010) **Connolly's**
The modern-day pioneer of coastal Maldonado is also a pioneer of adding Viognier (14%) into its Tannat blend,

- lending an inviting perfume to this complex, ageworthy red blend. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 14%
- Bodegones del Sur, Amphora Merlot-Tannat, Maldonado/Canelones 2019** 93
£18.99-£19 (2018) **The Good Wine Shop, Vinos Latinos**
The youngest generation of one of Uruguay's best-known wine dynasties delves into the world of natural wines with this impressive debut blend of Tannat and Merlot (50% each) aged in amphora. Juicy, fresh and polished. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14.8%
- Viñedo de los Vientos, Anarkia Tannat, Canelones 2017** 93
£13 **Condor Wines, Vinos Latinos, Wines of Uruguay**
Tannat, but not as you know it. Pablo Fallabrino was the first Uruguayan to make a foray into natural wine and this no added-sulphite 100% Tannat is pure forest fruit expression, muddled with exotic spice and polished tannins. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14%
- Toscanini, Adagio Espresso, Canelones 2016** 92
N/A UK www.toscaniniwines.com
This family winery blends Tannat, Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon in this rich red from Paso Cuello in northern Canelones.

- Deep fruit intensity lifted with notes of forest herbs and fresh black pepper. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.9%
- Varela Zarranz, 1888 Marselán, Canelones 2018** 92
N/A UK www.varelazarranz.com
This stylish natural wine has deep concentration balanced with supple tannins and a long, aromatic finish. Setting the bar high for this promising new variety that's being planted widely in Uruguay. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.8%
- ⑤ **Artesana, Tannat-Merlot-Zinfandel, Canelones 2016** 89
N/A UK www.artesanawinery.com
Each family brings its own unique twist to Uruguay's wines – and this Californian family planted the country's first Zinfandel, which adds a juicy plushness to this red blend (55% Tannat, 30% Merlot, 15% Zinfandel). Ideal for summer barbecues. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13.8%
- Bodega Brisas, Altos de José Ignacio Reserve Tannat, Maldonado 2018** 89
£14-£15.59 (2017) **Bibendum Wine, Buy Great Wine, Exel, The Fine Wine Co**
From the granitic soils of Maldonado on the northern coast, this vibrant and youthful Tannat is a fresh, spicy style of Uruguay's emblematic grape variety from the sister winery of Garzón. Ideal with grilled lamb. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



Renowned wine guide Descorchados chose Bodega Garzón as Winery of the Year and our Petit Clos Tannat as Uruguay's best red.

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Expert's choice: Uruguay

From intense, textured Tannats to fresh, ocean-influenced Albariños, Marina Gayan MW selects 18 wines to kickstart your journey of discovery



Many wine lovers around the world are yet to taste Uruguayan wines. This is perhaps because of the small scale of the country's wine production and Uruguay's relatively recent arrival on the international wine scene. Bearing in mind that only 5% of the country's bottled wines are exported, this tasting showcases fully half of the producers who export the highest quality Vinos de Calidad Preferente (VCP) wines.

The predominance of red wines is perhaps not surprising in a country where most of the land is dedicated to beef production. Uruguay has the highest per capita consumption of beef in the world (56kg, followed closely by Argentina with 54kg). Of the 6,100ha of vineyards in Uruguay, 4,900ha are planted with red grapes, predominantly Tannat and Merlot. All but one of the reds in this selection are made, wholly or in part, from Uruguay's flagship grape variety,

Tannat. The eight single-variety Tannats here share a few characteristics: colour intensity, oak ageing (two wines are unoaked), textured tannins, refreshing acidity and a savoury edge that enhances the dark fruit.

All in the blend

To my mind, Tannat blends are Uruguay's secret weapon. The top three wines here showcase the quality that can be achieved in this country. Surprisingly, none of them comes from Canelones, Uruguay's most important wine region, which accounts for 65% of the country's vineyards. One is a Merlot-based blend from the volcanic soils of Cerro del Guazuvirá in Lavalleja. The other two are Tannat-based blends from coastal Maldonado – one from Viña Edén and the other from Garzón.

'To my mind, Tannat blends are Uruguay's secret weapon'

When it comes to whites, Albariño and Sauvignon Blanc are logical grape varieties for the terroir. Uruguay is surrounded by water on all sides except for its northern border with Brazil. The maritime climate is similar to that of Galicia, the Spanish homeland of Albariño, and even though the variety remains niche in Uruguay, with only 47ha of vineyards planted, quality is blossoming. There is a little more Sauvignon Blanc planted (about 120ha) and the wine I have recommended here demonstrates the quality potential of this variety in Uruguay. Salud!

Marina Gayan MW is Argentina's first and only Master of Wine. Now based in Buenos Aires, she was DWWA Regional Chair for Argentina 2010-2014



Bouza, Albariño, Canelones 2019 95
£19.95 (2018) **Jeroboams**
This wine is the perfect Albariño archetype. Lovely fresh apricots, white-fleshed nectarines and yeasty notes. Beautifully lifted palate of layered citrus and stone fruits, with mineral notes and an underlying saltiness. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14.5%



Bodegas Carrau, Juan Carrau Sauvignon Blanc Sur Lie, Canelones 2018 95
N/A UK www.bodegascarrau.com
What a nice surprise! A Sauvignon Blanc that is elegant and mineral; marked by yeasty aromas together with citrus and subdued tropical notes. Lovely texture and zingy acidity. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



Bodega Garzón, Balasto, Maldonado 2017 95
£100 **Liberty Wines**
A blend of Tannat, Cabernet Franc, Petit Verdot and Marselan made only in the best years. Dark and bold with intense aromas of plum and spices. A wine that begs for time in bottle. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%



Cerro Chapeu, Reserva Tannat, Rivera 2018 92
N/A UK www.cerrochapeu.com
A balanced, modern and approachable Tannat with substance. Violets, blue fruit and quince, smooth tannins and light toasty oak. Lovely blueberries lifted by acidity. Fantastic value. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13%



Narbona, Roble Tannat, Colonia 2015 91
£21.99 **HispaMerchants**
Its dark inky colour is rapidly matched by dense dark fruits and red plums. Then come the tobacco nuances giving it a classic feel. Quite big and tannic, with a fair amount of oak adding structure and complexity – but still juicy. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.5%



Antigua Bodega Stagnari, Mburucuyá, Canelones 2015 90
N/A UK www.antiguabodegastagnari.com.uy
Pepper aromas with dark fruit and a touch of white pepper. Juicy raspberries and blackberries with a vibrant acidity and light yet grainy tannins. Serve this unoaked blend slightly chilled. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%



Familia Deicas, Extreme Vineyards Cerro del Guazuvirá, Lavalleja 2018 95
£31 **Condor Wines, The Good Wine Shop, Vinos Latinos**
Merlot, Tannat, Petit Verdot and Viognier. Entices with notes of black plums, olives, spice and toast. Structured, concentrated, with juicy fruit. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Viña Edén, Cerro Negro Gran Reserva, Maldonado 2016 95
N/A UK www.vinaeden.com
A blend of Tannat, Merlot and Marselan with complex aromas of blueberries, spices and smoky oak. Beautiful elegance with a vibrant acidity showing off its oceanic influence. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.9%



De Lucca, Río Colorado Reserve, Canelones 2011 94
£25 **Vinos Latinos**
Shows Tannat's ageing potential. Blended with Cabernet and Merlot, it displays classic earthy aromas of tobacco and dark fruit. Meaty and juicy on the palate. A serious wine. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 13.5%



Bodegas Castillo Viejo, Reserva de la Familia Tannat, Canelones 2017 90
N/A UK www.castilloviejo.com
Floral notes and ripe plums give way to savoury and spicy notes. Textured yet supple tannins and well-integrated sweet oak flavours. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Familia Traversa, Viña Salort Reserva Tannat, Canelones 2018 90
£10.99 **Condor Wines**
Good value. Supple tannins coupled with sweet coconut oak notes deliver pure charm. Luscious red fruits and a smooth texture make this wine very approachable – if you like oak. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%



Pizzorno, Maceración Carbónica Tannat, Canelones 2019 90
N/A UK www.pizzornowines.com
Carbonic maceration makes this Tannat soft, juicy and delicious. We are in the land of serious Beaujolais, deliciously fruity but with a savoury undertone and a minerality to its tannins. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



Giménez Méndez, Premium Tannat, Canelones 2018 93
£25 **Laithwaite's**
Packed with aromas of blueberries and blackcurrants. The palate opens with a chocolatey attack, layered with black pepper and vanilla. Chalky tannins and powerful oak. **Drink** 2021-2028 **Alc** 14.5%



Marichal, Grand Reserve A Tannat, Canelones 2015 93
£27.99 **Vinos Latinos**
Lovely expression of black forest fruit and spices with a hint of vanilla. Concentrated chalky tannins are balanced by juicy fruit, keeping the plentiful oak in line. Let it breathe. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 13.5%



Ariano Hermanos, Don Julio Ariano Special Reserve Tannat-Merlot-Syrah, Canelones 2017 92
N/A UK www.arianohermanos.com
Juicy dark fruits and toasty oak notes are followed by spices and plums, rounded out nicely by sweet tannins. Persistent finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 14%



Casa Grande, Super Blend, Canelones 2015 89
N/A UK www.vinoscasagrande.com
The character in the funky label mirrors this wine's charm. Packed with red and black fruit and meatiness. The blend includes Tempranillo and Arinarnoa, a crossing of Tannat and Cabernet. **Drink** 2020 **Alc** 13%



Familia Dardanelli, Family Reserve Merlot, Canelones 2018 89
£15 www.familiadardanelli.com.uy
Cake-like aromas carry through to the palate. Prunes and figs combined with sweet oak notes. Powerful tannins match the ripe fruit, while the acidity holds the wine together. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.4%

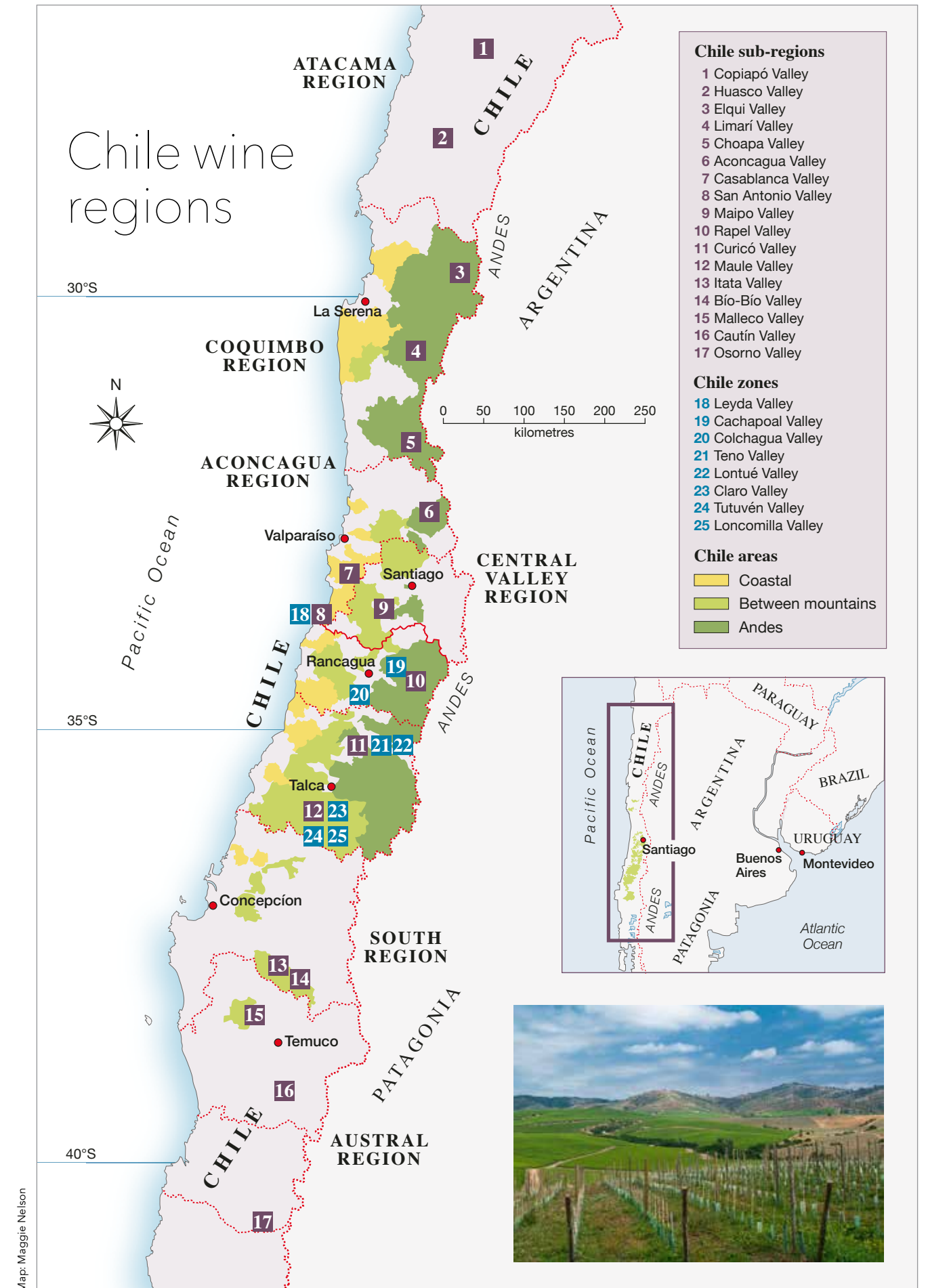


Pisano, Río de los Pájaros Reserve Tannat, Canelones 2018 89
£21.95 **Fine Wine Direct**
Lovely bright purple colour. Perfumed aromas of violets and blueberries. Good concentration of juicy, soft, dark fruit balancing a pleasant structure. A good lunch wine. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13.5%



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The sun rises over
Viña Santa Rita estate
in the Maipo Valley

Location, location

Chile is not defined by one grape in particular. Patricio Tapia considers the diversity of its varieties and styles, and explains why site can matter most

One might compare it to the sense of disappointed love after a brief yet intense romance. The fact is that when the Chilean wine industry realised that its newly rediscovered Carmenère was a difficult grape – and that not everyone liked it – the idea of having it as a flagship variety lost appeal. Suddenly it had the same feeble foundations as the fantasies of a betrayed lover.

It was at that point – around the middle of the last decade – that Chilean producers began to talk about diversity. They argued that a single grape variety shouldn't represent Chile (like Malbec in Argentina), but that many different varieties should represent the diversity of climates and soils that can be found in the country. Indeed, in a territory with

two such major geological formations as the Cordillera de la Costa and the Andes mountains, plus the strong influence of the Pacific and latitude stretching across over 2,000km of vine-growing territory, the idea of highlighting diversity made perfect sense.

After this general reflection in the industry, producers slowly began to look at their wines from another perspective. So today, if you want to understand Chilean wines in terms of styles, the best thing to do is to look at their origins and how the grapes have adapted to Chile's particular, myriad growing conditions. Let's start in the north.

Fresh from Limarí

Winemaker Marcelo Papa has worked with grapes from the Limarí Valley since

the mid-1990s. Today, among his many other responsibilities as technical director of the giant Concha y Toro, Papa is in charge of the company's Maycas line, which focuses on grapes from Limarí, an area located about 300km north of Chile's capital, Santiago.

For Papa, the limestone soils of the area and the freshening influence of the Pacific are the keys to understanding why grapes such as Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are giving such good results here.

'The fresh character of these wines is accentuated thanks to the morning fog that comes in from the sea, reducing the brightness of the sun and lowering temperatures. The more light and heat, the more ripe and tropical flavours, and the less mineral character that comes from the lime of the soil,' says Papa.

These Limarí Pinots and Chardonnays are among the most distinctive styles of wine in Chile. They boast exuberant fruit, a lack of sweetness in the most successful examples and an accentuated minerality which, as Papa says, seems to come from the soil of the place, helped by the strong influence of the refreshing breezes from the Pacific.

Coastal wines

The presence of the Pacific is a permanent force in Chilean wine, a force that manifests itself in all of Chile's coastal valleys, from the classic areas such as Casablanca and San Antonio, to



Photograph: Matt Wilson/Cephas



Above: Cabernet dominates in Concha y Toro's Puente Alto vineyard in Maipo

'The fresh character of these Limarí wines is accentuated thanks to the morning fog that comes in from the sea' **Marcelo Papa (left)**

newer regions such as Paredones in the Colchagua Valley and Aconcagua Costa in the Aconcagua Valley.

The vineyards in these coastal areas are located in the hills of the Coastal Range, or Cordillera de la Costa, the mountainous formation that runs parallel to the ocean and receives the fresh sea breezes from the icy waters of the Pacific. These hills are composed of clay and granite from which some of the best Chilean Sauvignon Blancs traditionally ➤



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The essence of Bodega José Ignacio's wine is our land. The knowledge and commitment of our winemaker Hans Vinding Diers, who acts as interpreter of our land and brings out the best of each grape, joins our passion to produce excellence in wines that express a great sense of oceanic origin.

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The cycle of the moon and the stars guides our production processes. In harmony with the oceanic breeze and the richness of our land, they set out the rules for our day-to-day work in the estate.

Our local wine collection is conceived in Bodega Océánica José Ignacio, set in an inspiring surrounding. The fresh marine breezes from the Atlantic Ocean, the morning mists and the wind come together in our elegant oceanic

wines, with a very special sensitivity that renders soft flavors and intense varietal aromas.

Elements seek elevation, lightness, and this movement reveals our work philosophy with determination. The architectural design aims the sky; José Ignacio's marine breeze bestows vitality to the crops; art pieces inspire, in substance, the estate character. Agriculture focused in the detail, environmental commitment and team work, together with the passion for art and cutting-edge architecture, forge our purpose: the satisfaction of experiencing and offering everyday meaningful sensations. A simple and stylish lifestyle in which magic occurs.



Photograph: John Warburton-Lee Photography/Alamy Stock Photo



Viña Cousiño-Macul vineyards on the outskirts of Santiago

originate. These are white wines with unctuous body thanks to the clay, but at the same time, crisp acidity and refreshing flavour thanks to the Pacific influence.

While there are many examples of the vital and exuberant style of Chilean coastal Sauvignon, other grapes also give very good results when they're planted in coastal vineyards. Look out in particular for Syrah, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay from the Chilean coast.

Evolution of Carmenère

Between the Cordillera de la Costa and the Andes, the soils are more fertile and the temperature higher. Historically this 'intermediate depression', as it is known, has been the source of large-volume wines. But it also produces quality reds made from grapes that like heat and sun, far away from the cooling influence of the sea. Carménère is one of them.

'Carmenère is versatile, being able to deliver big and expansive wines with a riper style, or fresher and lighter reds in its juiciest version'

Sebastián Labbé (below)

'Carmenère is always a challenging variety, from the vineyard to the winery. It is versatile, being able to deliver big and expansive wines with a riper style, or fresher and lighter reds in its juiciest version,' says Sebastián Labbé, winemaker at Viña Santa Rita.

In the Colchagua Valley, Labbé produces a 'new school' expression of Carmenère. This is a recent style in which herbal notes are clearly present. In the past, that herbal side would have been hidden by ageing and by the extensive use of new oak.

'I think that today we're seeing a new wave of Carmenère,' continues Labbé. 'Winemakers are no longer afraid of vegetal characters and are seeking to show that fresher and crunchier side of the variety. They are making wines with character and more red fruit, that have greater acidity, but without losing their body. However, I think that both styles have a point in common, which is the silkiness of their texture, something which is always distinctive to Carmenère,' he adds.

Classic Cabernet

The Carmenère grape was imported to Chile in the mid-19th century, along with several other French grapes, among them Cabernet Sauvignon – the grape variety perhaps most often associated with Chile. Although Cabernet has been planted in practically all of Chile's wine regions (except in coastal areas, where it seems to be too cold for the variety), the classic Chilean Cabernet comes from the strip of land that runs at the foot of the Andes, especially in the so-called Alto Maipo.

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the Andes – Alto Maipo Cabernet displays its trademark herbal and eucalyptus notes, plus firm tannins coated with black and red fruit flavours. This classic style has not evolved, except for the presence of eucalyptus notes which, in modern versions made by the likes of Cousiño-Macul, Domus Aurea, Don Melchor or Almaviva, seem to have been attenuated.

‘We don’t consider eucalyptus aromas, which come from trees near the property, to be a characteristic of the Cabernet grape. And that’s why we avoid selecting lots that have that character,’ explains Almaviva’s winemaker, Michel Friou.



Southern styles

If Cabernet from Maipo represents the classic side of Chile, wines from the south – from Maule Valley to Bío-Bío – represent the pure tradition of the Chilean countryside. These are dry-farmed areas, with non-irrigated vineyards and very old vines. The Maule is the land of Carignan, a grape that was imported into Chile in the 1940s and today gives wines of deep acidity, firm tannins and intense colour; hearty reds to go with the rustic yet delicious food from the region.

‘If Cabernet from Maipo represents the classic side of Chile, wines from the south represent the pure tradition of the Chilean countryside’

Further south, in Itata, scented Moscatel and fruity Cinsault dominate. Itata’s wine history stretches back almost 500 years, when the Spanish

conquistadors established the first vineyards in this area of mountains and hillsides. Traditionally Moscatel has been made – and continues to be made – in a full-bodied style, usually fermented on its skins, and with intense aromas of flowers and fruits. In comparison, Cinsault produces a light, refreshing and crunchy wine with red fruits.

In a similar style, although perhaps more earthy, are wines made from the País grape in Bío-Bío. The grape variety was originally brought to Chile by the Spaniards during the conquest of the New World. ‘The País here reflects the coldest climate in the area. It has a herbal, balsamic and sometimes floral character. It gives delicate reds, even refined,’ says producer Roberto Henríquez, one of the most important País producers in Chile.

To compare the País of Henríquez with the Pinot Noir of Marcelo Papa in Limarí is to compare different worlds. And this exercise can be done with many other wines in Chile, a country where more than grape varieties, the diversity of the landscape defines the wines.

Patricio Tapia is a regular Decanter contributor and the author of the annual Deschorchados guide to the wines of South America

Sustainability in Chilean wine

As in other areas of the world, most of Chile’s vineyards are located in regions with defined seasons. Dry summers are followed by seasonal rains that begin only in the autumn, providing a good natural framework for growing healthy vines.

However, increasing production volumes and the industrialisation of the Chilean wine industry in the past have affected the environment. Producers today are acknowledging this impact, and consequently the idea of sustainability has begun to gain strength.

Since 2008, efforts have been made to regulate the production of wines in Chile, from the vineyard to bottling and transportation. ‘Today there is a sustainability code that originally covered vineyards, winery, bottling and social responsibility. This year, we added a new area of wine tourism,’ says Patricio Parra, who is

the head of the sustainability project for Wines of Chile.

The code certifies aspects such as waste management, maintenance of native trees, integrated pest management, rational use of water in the winery and the wellbeing of workers and communities. When the requirements of all areas of the code have been met, certification allows wineries to use sustainability seals on their bottles.

‘Although certification in the vineyard, for example, is not as strict as that of a certified biodynamic entity, there is a strong commitment to produce wine of high sustainability standards,’ adds Parra.

Initially, in 2011, the Certification Code was signed by 11 Chilean wineries. By last year there were already 76 committed wineries, which today represent 80% of the wine that Chile produces.

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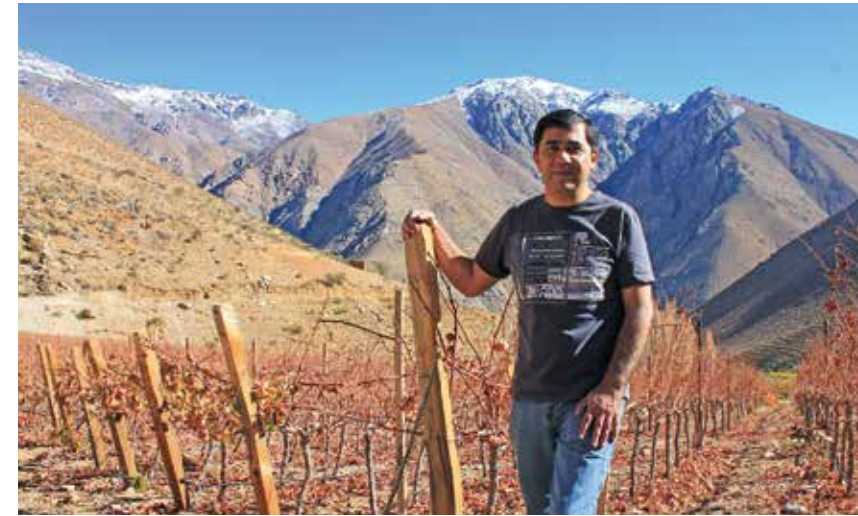
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Extreme viticulture

Desert regions with salt-laden soil, snowy mountainsides and active volcanoes are among the unlikely locations where Chile's winemakers are experimenting – and often succeeding. Chris Losh hails their spirit

Viñedos de Alcohuaz
at up to 2,000m altitude
in the Elqui Valley



'If you want to make a great wine, you must take a risk. Safe places [equal] boring wine'

Marcelo Retamal (above)

Around the millennium, much of Chile's wine production – and just about all the interest – was firmly centred within a 150km radius of Santiago. Well, not any more. Over the past 20 years, Chile's grape-growing boundaries have not so much been pushed back as disappeared altogether. Producers are planting in areas that previous generations probably couldn't even have found on a map, let alone considered for viticulture.

From the dust of the Atacama Desert in the north to the verdant hills of the Lake District in the south, from the breezy Pacific coast to the stony Andes slopes, vineyards are springing up everywhere. It's a wholesale reimagining of what Chilean wine is, can be, and perhaps always should have been, all about.

Chile's central plain – the area between the Andes and the Coastal Range – is a ridiculously easy place to grow, well, anything. But vines need to struggle. Marginality is where the good stuff is. So Chile's wineries began to push the envelope, mostly heading west towards the sea and north towards the desert.

Given that the Atacama is one of the driest, most sun-drenched regions on earth, it might seem a strange place to look for a cooler climate, but in fact once you get to the Limari Valley, 400km north of Santiago, the Coastal Range is far lower. Fog fills vineyards until lunchtime and there are cool breezes all the time.

With temperatures significantly lower, it's no surprise that grapes in places such as Tabalí's Talinay vineyard ripen much

later than they do inland. In fact, it's one of the particularities of Chile's topography that moving 10km east or west can have a greater impact than moving hundreds of kilometres north or south.

Mountain influence

Of course, if you go far enough away from the coast other factors start to come into play. Factors such as the Andes. These mountains have some effect even on the Central Valley, with cool air from the peaks washing down over the vineyards at night. But over the past couple of decades, some pioneers have even taken to planting into the mountains themselves.

Tabalí's Río Hurtado vineyard might (like Talinay) be in the Limari Valley, but it could hardly be more different. Situated 100km from the coast, it's 1,600m up into the Andes on the granitic east-facing slopes of a narrow river valley. It's a place of endless sunshine and big diurnal temperature swings that make it possible to grow varieties such as Malbec and

Viognier. Aresti, meanwhile, is going down a different route with its 1,200m-altitude estate located 130km from the sea in the Curicó Andes, bringing a more elegant spin to Merlot.

Chile's king of high-altitude viticulture, however, is Marcelo Retamal of Viñedos de Alcohuaz. At 85km from the coast, his vineyards in Elqui are a (literally) dizzying 2,000m above sea level. The Andes here are famous for the purity of their light – one of the reasons they're loved by astronomers (and if the local legends are true, aliens). The sun intensity and altitude here combine to give reds of rare tannic structure, ripeness and lift.

'Elqui is one of the cleanest skies in the world,' says Retamal. 'The problem is the radiation. The temperature in summer is not really high, but light and the UV are very strong.' He's putting his money on the likes of Grenache, Syrah, Touriga Nacional, Carignan and Malbec – and foot-treading for gentle tannin extraction.

At these altitudes, it's hardly risk-free. In 2016, springtime snow cost the winery more than 80% of its production. But Retamal is unfazed. 'If you want to make a great wine, you must take a risk,' he says. 'Safe places [equal] boring wine.'

Northern challenge

Until fairly recently Elqui was as far north as Chilean wineries went. But in 2007, Viña Ventisquero started planting in Huasco, 800km north of Santiago in the Atacama Desert, a place where, as winemaker Alejandro Galaz points out, 'it hasn't rained in 50 years'.

Soberingly, this isn't even the biggest challenge. After all, there's always irrigation from the nearby river. No, the big issue here is stupendously poor soil that is, moreover, so salty you could probably sprinkle it on your chips. ➤



Viña Ventisquero, Atacama

Photograph: Estanis Nuñez

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'If you read the research about what a vine can hold in salinity levels, we are over 10 times that amount,' says Galaz cheerfully of his poor struggling plants. 'It's an extreme place that produces extreme wines, [but] nature finds a way!'

Unsurprisingly, given the costs, effort and unpredictability of planting up in the Andes or on the fringes of the world's driest desert, the north and the east of Chile are only for the seriously committed.

Coastal effect

But there has been no shortage of growers prepared to look for sites with maritime influence. In fact, this boundary has been steadily moving seawards ever since the Casablanca Valley was planted in the 1980s. The Leyda Valley has been the most obvious success story, but nearby Lo Abarca, just 4km from the sea, is even cooler. Casa Marin and Matetic make excellent wines here with the likes of Riesling, Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir on the more exposed slopes, and bright, elegant Syrah and (experimental) Grenache on warmer folds in the hills.

'We are sheltered from the ocean by just one small hill,' says winemaker Felipe Marin of the area that received its own DO in 2018. 'We have less than 1,000 growing degree days – similar to the coolest regions of France. The difference is that we have a lot of sun intensity and no rainfall,' he adds.

Incredibly, some producers are planting even closer to the ocean than this. Viña Luis Felipe Edwards has an experimental vineyard of Sauvignon Blanc, Pinot Noir and Chardonnay a couple of kilometres from the Pacific in what it believes is the most coastal site in Chile. The country's wineries will be awaiting the results with interest.

Southern success

Chile's southern renaissance has perhaps been the big story of the past 20 years.

The shift from growers selling grapes to bottling their own wine has re-energised the Maule and Itata Valleys. Old vines are part of the attraction, but don't underestimate the lower temperatures and regular rainfall, both of which are seen as a long-term counterpoint to climate change.

Rebecca Palmer, associate director and buyer at merchant Corney & Barrow, has taken on a number of the country's southern producers. 'There's no doubt that there's a lot going on,' she says. 'The south of Chile has always been very vibrant and there's a real sense of fomenting energy and spirit.' She cites the more savoury Pinot Noirs from places such as Bío-Bío as being particularly worth a look – especially with Burgundy prices soaring.

Wine producers, however, are moving on even from what used to be seen as the far south – so much so that in 2012 the country's wine body announced the designation of a new region, Austral, with two DOs below Malleco.

De Martino has just planted in Pucón, on the foothills of Villarrica – one of Chile's most active volcanoes. With winter snow, high rainfall and lava soils, Sebastian De Martino describes it as 'an extreme continental climate... a cool-climate version of Etna' and can't wait to see how his ungrafted Pinot, Chardonnay and

Riesling perform. 'We expect the wines to be mineral,' he says.

Casa Silva is even further south down the Pan-American Highway, planting Champagne grapes in Osorno. 'I think it is becoming the region for espumantes (sparkling wines) in Chile,' says Mario Pablo Silva. Similar thinking lies behind Aurelio Montes' decision to plant on the eastern side of the Chiloé archipelago, at a similar latitude to New Zealand's Marlborough, but in the full glare of the Pacific's mighty cooling influence. It's a gamble, yes, but it's also hugely exciting.

The past 20 years have seen unparalleled exploration and experimentation in Chile. Traditional varieties are being made in different styles and new grapes are coming to the party. There will be a few failures along with the successes for sure, but it's going to be one heck of a ride.

And the best bit of all is that it's only just begun. ➤

Chris Losh has been writing about wine for more than 20 years and was editor of Wine Magazine and Imbibe. His latest book is *Where to Drink Wine: the essential guide to the world's must-visit wineries* (£22, Quadrille, September 2018)



Mario Pablo Silva of
Viña Casa Silva in his
vineyard in Lago Ranco

Photograph: Nicolás Aguayo Fuenzalida; Matt Wilson/Cephas

Losh selects his top 12 wines from Chile’s extreme vineyards

① **De Martino, Tres Volcanes Chardonnay, Malleco 2017** 95 £26.99-£27.95 **AG Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd**
De Martino is consistently at the forefront of new thinking in Chile, and when its Quebrada Seca vineyard in Limarí keeled over due to drought, it headed 650km south of Santiago in search of rainfall and coolness. This is the result – a wonderful expression of cool-climate Chardonnay, all white pear and apple fruit, with a lovely crunchy minerality giving the palate stretch and length. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alcohol** 13.5%

Concha y Toro, Marques de Casa Concha Chardonnay, Limarí 2017 92 £12.99 **Tesco, TJ Wines, Villeneuve Wines**
Concha is a big believer in the potential of northern Limarí for Chardonnay – and this wine shows why. It’s a hugely beguiling mix of classic oaked Chardonnay flavours – white peach, melon and creamy hazelnut – with inherent lift and lovely structural integration. The 2015 picked up a DWWA Trophy, so it has pedigree. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

J Bouchon, Batuco Estate Granito Semillon, Maule 2018 90 £34.99 **Bacchanalia, Banstead Vintners, Connolly’s, Dronfield Wine World, The Oxford Wine Co, Vinos Latinos**
There’s not a lot of Semillon in Chile, but on this evidence perhaps there should be. Dry-farmed from old vines in Maule, there’s plenty of vibrant fruit character here – lemon balm, orange peel, citrus leaves – but the most striking aspect is the salty, mineral note coming from the granitic soil. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 13.5%

Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Riesling, Futrono, Austral 2017 89 £17.28-£20 **Cartwright Brothers Vintners, Field & Fawcett, Penistone Wine Cellars, The Oxford Wine Co**
A Riesling for the purists from one of Chile’s coolest vineyards, looking out over mighty Lake Ranco. This wine is all about cool apples and lemon edges. Zesty and fresh with bright, mouthwatering acidity. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 11.5%

② **Massoc Frères, La Gringa Moscatel, Itata 2017** 89 £14.95 **Corney & Barrow**
This shows the potential of old-vine Moscatel in Itata. La Gringa translates as ‘American Girl’, and there’s something feminine, but also coolly assured, about this. Orchard fruit, almond blossom and a gently smoky, mineral palate. Hugely drinkable. **Drink** 2020-2020 **Alc** 13.5%

Falernia, Riesling, Elqui 2018 87 £11.25-£12.37 **Exel, Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct**
Elqui is a very particular place to grow grapes – and this is an interesting expression of Riesling. Fresh lime and tropical flavours; while the acidity is gentler than you’d expect in the variety. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 12.5%

Maturana Wines, Naranjo Torontel, Maule 2018 90 £14.95-£15.25 **Corney & Barrow, The Bon Vivant’s Companion**
An orange wine with an intriguing nose of honey, blood oranges, white peach, thyme and white pepper. The exotic attack tapers to a dry, spicy palate with gentle tannic grip that makes it great for food. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13.5%

Clos des Fous, Arenaria Aconcagua Costa Pinot Noir, Aconcagua 2014 95 £31.99-£32.99 **AG Wines, Simply Wines Direct**

Two of the three ‘fous’ (crazies) worked in Burgundy and sought to bring Burgundian, terroir-driven winemaking to Chile. This pale, perfumed coastal Pinot is a classy example of what Chile can do with the grape. Its raspberry core is overlaid with spice and gentle earthy notes. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 15%

③ **Tabalí, Talinay Pinot Noir, Calcareo Costero, Limarí 2015** 93 £17.95-£20.99 **All About Wine, D Byrne & Co, Exel**
Tabalí’s Talinay vineyard is one of the closest to the sea in Limarí and you can see the influence of the cooling fog and sea breezes here. The charming black cherry fruit is topped off with violets and a dusting of five spice. And though the palate is juicily succulent, the fruit is held in check by a gentle salinity on the finish. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%

Carmen, Loma Seca Cinsault, Itata 2019 92 £25 **Santa Rita Estates**
Carignan has become something of A Thing in Chile’s southern valleys, but another C-grape worth looking out for is Cinsault. With its delicate raspberry and strawberry fruit, a flick of spice and bright acidity, this out-Pinots many of the country’s Pinots. One to pair with salt marsh lamb or monkfish in pancetta. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 14%

La Ronciere, Idahue Estate Malbec, Curicó 2017 89 £13.95 **Corney & Barrow**
Chilean Malbec is quite different from versions on the other side of the Andes. With 8% Merlot and 7% Cabernet Franc, this has plush plum fruits, but also bitter chocolate. Oak adds a coffee note, so it’s more savoury and textural than you’d expect. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%

Laurent, Polemico País, Itata 2018 87 £11.95 **Corney & Barrow**
País has seen a big turnaround in fortunes over the last 10 years. Integrated redcurrant and red cherry fruit, with a comforting kiss of almonds and red leather on the finish. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 13%



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Chile: my top 20

With an increasingly diverse range of wine styles being produced in Chile, Alistair Cooper MW recommends a selection of his favourite red, white and rosé bottles to give you a taste of what's on offer



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Miguel Torres, Estelado Sparkling Rosé NV, Secano Interior, Maule 90
£12.50-£14.99 Available through UK agent Fells
A project that helped to kickstart the Chilean País revival. A delicious traditional-method sparkler with subtle red fruits and a lively, focused palate. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12%



Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Sauvignon Blanc, Futrono, Austral 2017 94
£20.94 Jackson Nugent
A superb wine from one of Chile's most southerly vineyards on volcanic ash soils. The nose is citrus-led with a steely minerality. The palate has tantalising acidity and the finish is very long. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12%



Ventisquero, Kalfu Sumpai Sauvignon Blanc, Huasco, Atacama 2017 92
£16.59-£18.65 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Frontier Fine Wines, Promotion Wines, Salut, Waples Wines
Subtle herbal nose, lime tomato leaf, smoke. Zippy palate marked by a salty twang from the area's very saline soils. Long and well-defined finish. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 12.5%



Calyptra, Vivendo Rosé, Cachapoal 2017 91
N/A UK www.calyptra.cl
85% Syrah, 15% Sauvignon Blanc. A lovely aromatic combination of ripe red fruits and subtle pepper notes. Real tension on the palate with crisp acidity and a long, linear mid-palate. Sweet fruit but with marked freshness. A rosé style I'd love to see more of in Chile. **Drink** 2020-2021 **Alc** 14%



Aresti, Family Collection, Curicó 2012 94
£19.95 Slurp
An intense nose of roasted coffee, grilled meat and balsamic notes with a splash of well-controlled volatility. Tannins still give amazingly firm support to a lively fruit core with kirsch and a dash of eucalypt. Powerful yet still refined and very well put together. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 14.5%



Longaví, Glup Cinsault, Itata 2018 94
£18.99 (2017) House of Townend
From Chilean producer Julio Bouchon and Cederberg's David Nieuwoudt. A vibrant, mineral and fruit-driven nose, with redcurrant, spice and pepper. Texturally this is supreme. Benchmark Itata Cinsault. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 12%



Undurraga, Terroir Hunter Syrah, Limarí 2015 94
£20.95 Eurowines
Crackling nose of black fruits, bitter chocolate and tapenade. Superbly concentrated with menthol, meat and olives, plus silky, elegant tannins. From a dry-farmed coastal site, this really shines. Long finish. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Viñedos de Alcohuz, La Era Malbec, Elqui 2015 94
£33 Indigo Wine
A brooding Malbec from 1,700m altitude. Packed with dark fruits and spice, and a hint of smoky reduction. A lovely streak of acidity keeps the wine crackling with energy. Concentration and nicely tuned tannins. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 13%



Bisquertt, Q Clay, Marchihue, Colchagua 2015 93
N/A UK www.bisquertt.cl
Classic Colchagua pastille fruit and a vibrant cassis nose, with hedgerow fruit aplenty. The palate is still very youthful with a nice, earthy coolness and loads of fruit concentration. From one of my favourite recent vintages. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14.5% ➤



Santa Rita, Floresta Field Blend Tinto, Colchagua 2018 93
£25 **Santa Rita Estates**
The ultimate Chilean blend? A juicy, spicy nose showing both red and dark fruits, with liquorice root and sculpted tannins. It shows the spice of Carmenère yet with great drinkability, especially for Apalta. **Drink** 2020-2027 **Alc** 14.4%



Tarapacá, Gran Reserva Carmenère, Maipo 2018 93
£12.85 **Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct**
Spice-led nose with dried figs and hedgerow fruit. Medium-bodied with silky soft, fine tannins and a mineral palate saturated with dark fruits, mocha and cedar spice. This should age beautifully. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 14%



Volcanes de Chile, Parinacota, Maule 2016 93
£21.99 (2014) **Ministry of Drinks**
An inky, deep red with aromas of black pepper and a touch of menthol. Rounded, robust tannins balance the palate of red fruits and smoky dark cherries. All supported by a lovely freshness from the Carignan. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%



Bouchon, País Viejo, Maule 2019 92
£11.95-£12.95 (2018) **Connolly's, Roberts & Speight, Slurp, Vinos Latinos, Yorkshire Vintners**
Bursting with redcurrant, liquorice, rosehip and cherries on the nose. An invigorating palate, with fine-grained tannins, plus a slightly leathery and smoky kick. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 12.5%



Cono Sur, Single Vineyard Block 21 Viento Mar Pinot Noir, San Antonio 2017 92
N/A UK www.conosur.com
Beautiful nose with earthy notes, vibrant fruit and a real freshness. The red and dark fruits are more in the background here. This is all about grip, earth and structure. Superb value. **Drink** 2020-2023 **Alc** 14.3%



Korta, Seleccion Especial Grosse Méridle, Sagrada Familia, Curicó 2017 92
N/A UK www.korta.cl
A rare French variety with a distinct herbal and floral nose, plus notes of clove and strawberry. An interesting wine that reminds me of Trousseau. Serve lightly chilled with cold meats. **Drink** 2020-2022 **Alc** 13%



Viu Manent, Viu Infinito, Colchagua 2016 92
£45 **Available via UK agent Louis Latour Agencies**
An attractive, ripe and powerful nose with cassis, leather and cedar, plus a vibrant pastille note. Fine, sinewy tannins that need some time to resolve. Fresh acidity with dark fruit and some Christmas spice. A long and clean finish. **Drink** 2022-2030 **Alc** 14%



Odfjell, Aliara, Central Valley 2014 91
£31.49 **Carruthers & Kent**
A pronounced and meaty nose showing quite a lot of development. There is a distinct meaty, leathery note on the mid-palate, with herbal and red fruit notes and firm tannins. Definitely a wine that would benefit from food: grilled red meat. **Drink** 2020-2025 **Alc** 14%



San Pedro, Sideral, Cachapoal Andes 2017 91
£21.50 **Great Western Wine**
I'm surprised at how evolved the nose is: liquorice and leather with roasted coffee and herbal notes. A distinct mocha and sweet cassis attack is followed by powdery and firm tannins, with quite primary oak. Will come together nicely with time. **Drink** 2020-2028 **Alc** 14%



Viña Leyda, Lot 21 Pinot Noir, Leyda 2015 91
£24-£29.50 **Exel, Great Western Wine, Great Wines Direct, The Fine Wine Co**
Aromatic nose with mulberry, raspberry and wild strawberry. Medium-bodied with fine tannins and a candied cherry note. Bags of freshness. **Drink** 2020-2026 **Alc** 13.5%



Errazuriz, Max Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Aconcagua 2017 89
£13-£15.40 **Christopher Keiller, Ocado, Waitrose, Waitrose Cellar**
Attractive blend of cassis, roasted coffee and subtle chocolate notes. Full of ripe black fruit, with firm tannins and a generous dollop of acidity. A great value all-rounder. **Drink** 2020-2024 **Alc** 13.5%



Alistair Cooper MW has worked for wineries in Argentina and Chile. He is a judge at DWWA and resident wine expert for BBC Radio Oxford



