

Cabernet – Chile's trump card?



Names to look out for from Ali, who has not let a little thing like a pandemic keep him out of the South American loop.

There's no shortage of exciting new projects and developments within Chile. Ancestral vines and varieties such as País, Carignan, Sémillon and Cinsault have refreshed the image of Chilean wine, alongside fascinating regions such as Malleco (watch for my upcoming report), Itata and Bío Bío.

Yet the most planted variety in Chile, the stalwart that is Cabernet Sauvignon, unquestionably still produces many of the country's finest wines. I will be writing a more substantial piece later in the year focusing on this Chilean classic, but I thought I would share a few notes on some of the more impressive Chilean Cabernets I have tasted during recent lockdown months.

It's fair to say that Cabernet is not the coolest kid on the block. Yet it still plays a hugely important role and represents 30% of total vineyard plantings in Chile. Many of the big players such as Montes, Carmen, Santa Carolina and Santa Rita have been working very hard over recent years to identify and isolate different genetic strains of Cabernet within Chile. There has also been significant work on terroir, plot division and soil profiling throughout Cabernet vineyards.

Maipo is considered the heartland of Chilean Cabernet, and one of its greatest subregions is Pirque. I recently took part in a tasting with Viña Ventisquero's winemakers Felipe Tosso and Sergio Hormazabal. I was sent all of the blending ingredients for their unreleased 2019 Enclave Cabernet blend, which included the main Cabernet components from their San Juan de Pirque and El Principal de Pirque vineyards. The former is from sandy-clay alluvial terraces at 1,000 m (3,280 ft) above sea level, and the wine showed real purity and finesse as well as extreme high definition. The latter parcel is from colluvial and alluvial vineyards at 750 m (2,460

ft) and expressed a beautiful savoury, earthy, rounder style of Cabernet. The wines were hugely different, distinctive and expressive, and more on the cassis spectrum rather than the minty fragrance often associated with Maipo.

A rising star in Pirque is [Piedra Sagrada](#) (pictured above) whose first vintage was 2014. This has to be one of the finest debuts that I can remember tasting in recent years. The 100% Cabernet is grown in a 4.5-hectare (11.1-acre) plot planted at 650 m (2,130 ft) between 2002 and 2005 and the project is led by Marco Pérez Ramírez with French consultant [Eric Verdier](#).

Outside Maipo, Marco Puyo's Dagaz project in Colchagua is another estate to watch. The wine is a restrained example of Colchagua Cabernet but with all the concentration and intensity that you would hope for from the region. I will be writing more extensively on Cabernet later in the year, and am even (perhaps somewhat optimistically!) planning to visit Chile, having been continually thwarted during 2020. Fingers are tightly crossed.

The following 14 wines are listed in order of score, from highest to lowest, but you can change this by using the self-sort menu below.

Piedra Sagrada, Cuvée Domaine de la Piedra Sagrada 2014 Pirque

Secondary herbal character on the nose, sweet cassis, graphite, earthy notes and damp tobacco and the slightest touch of green-pepper [pyrazine](#). A rich palate with generous, rounded, ripe, sweet dark fruits, subtle notes of coconut and vanilla and dried herbs, fully resolved fine dusty tannins and good acidity – liquorice and a cooling menthol note on the finish. A very accomplished wine, it truly speaks of its place. Texturally this is very good and in a really sweet spot at the moment but will hold for 3 or 4 years. (AC)

Drink 2021 – 2025

18

Piedra Sagrada, Cuvée Préstige Don Arturo Pérez Rojas 2015 Pirque

Developing slight bricking at the rim. Appealing nose of sweet liquorice, bay leaf and tobacco. A viscous palate with leafy ferrous notes, dried tobacco and blackberries. The tannins are fine, resolved and support the moderate acidity and rich opulent mid-palate. Pretty serious stuff from a warm vintage – with a lovely balance of sweet fruit and savoury secondary notes and a long cooling finish. Right in its drinking window. (AC)

14% Drink 2020 – 2024

17
