

WINES | with George Kassianos

# Chile's great shakes

The weather behaves itself most of the time in Chile. So blessed, phylloxera hasn't got to this part of the world yet and apart from a bit of mildew and a few red spiders making wine is relatively easy there.

For years Chile has been aiming high, with serious wines hitting our shores. Chilean wine has come a long way since the cheery supermarket stuff of the 80s and part of 90s and they have been doing it with indecently young vines, so what's been going on?

Much has changed, even in the six years since I was last there. In the 80s there were a handful of producers planting on the slopes, trying out a variety here, a clone there. Soils weren't such an issue as they are now, and the word microclimate was still a bit of a mystery. Now everybody is planting on the slopes, using undulating hills of the coastal range or the foothills of the Andes.

The varietal line up has got broader too, with nobody specialising and everybody experimenting with a whole host of varieties. From the usual suspects to Sangiovese, Mourvèdre, Malbec, Tempranillo, Viognier, even the Catalan variety Garro. Clone talk is rife and the peculiarities of particular sites are spouted with authority. The hard lessons of terroir have been learnt and learnt fast.

The industry is now full of foreign wine makers, many of them women, from South Africa and New Zealand, California and France. The Chileans are open to outside ideas and aren't afraid to use them. The foreign wine-makers, meanwhile, rather like what they see. And they stay, carving out a life for themselves with a view of the Andes.

The scale of investment is still huge. Instant coffee makers, cash-rich canned fruit producers and pharmaceutical manufacturers are pouring money into Napa-style wineries.

Earlier in the millennium as Chile's capital city Santiago spread nearer to the vines growing in the country's oldest wine region, the Maipo Valley, other vineyard owners

Known 30 years ago as good and cheap bulk buys, the wine of Chile has grown up since

were selling up to property developers, using the cash to invest in new wine-growing areas such as Bio Bio and Rio Claro. Wine is now the fifth most important industry for Chile.

Sons and daughters of family-owned bodegas, fresh from wine school at Davis or Dijon, experiment with grafting more popular varieties on their parents unfashionable Moscatel and Sémillon vines, turning out wines that win awards thousands of kilometres away.

The most exciting developments have come from the Bordeaux varieties of Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot – especially when blended and Carmenere. There are newcomers too, such as Syrah and Pinot Noir that are raising more than a few eyebrows. And the whites are slowly becoming world class, much more diverse.

Chilean reds are booming not least because Dr Alan Crozier of Glasgow University declared their health-giving potential in a report published in 1999. Chilean reds, especially Cabernet Sauvignon, were found to have particularly high level of flavanols.

No matter that most of Chile's Merlot is not really Merlot at all, but Carmenere, a little known Bordeaux variety that got misidentified when the first shipments arrived more than 120 years ago. It makes decent wine, thanks to the Chileans, and is making it on to labels on its own right. And in most cases it does a better job than true Merlot clones, it has more personality.

It used to be that at first glance the main differences among wines were marked out by the varying use of oak rather than distinctions from soil or microclimate. But the differences between, for example, a Bio

Bio Chardonnay and Casablanca Chardonnay are fast being realised and the region's diversity is becoming all important. Chardonnay doesn't generally have the assertive herbaceous character of the Loire and New Zealand, rather more tropical notes with a good dollop of citrus and pineapple. Viognier is another emerging hero and Riesling has started performing too.

Fearful that Chile would be

stuck with a reputation for decent bulk wine, the country's top wineries started 15 years ago concentrating their efforts on producing altogether more serious wines, linking up with prestigious wineries from in California and Europe. And they have achieved that using the latest equipment, getting even dirtier in the vineyards and helped by huge injections of capital.



## wines of the week

Established by a Catalan family over 75 years ago, Viña Viu Manent Reserva wines from Colchagua Valley have been consistently excellent, often outstanding cool climate red and whites. While Viu Manent is quite a large producer, it has always been and always will be a family run estate. The winemaking philosophy of Viu Manent focuses on creating quality driven wines that reflect their terroir, attention to detail is paramount for this family!

### 2015 Sauvignon Blanc, Abv 12.5%

This Sauvignon Blanc is a light greenish-yellow in colour. Fresh nose and fruity with aromas of white fruits, such as pears, white peaches, fresh lemon, lime and grapefruit, which helps mingle with saline and floral notes. Young, medium bodied on the palate, this wine is fresh with tropical and citrus fruit flavours of white grapefruit and lime with a long crisp finish and some minerality, a crowd pleaser, best with ceviche. €9.50

### 2015 Chardonnay, Abv 13%

Bright golden-yellow colour, it had a fresh and fruity nose with aromas of exotic fruits, banana, green apples, melon, pineapple and mandarin orange. The palate shows tremendous freshness, reasonably balanced, fruity, and with some volume and a subtle mineral touch. A great companion to fish, seafood and creamy pasta dishes. €9.50

### 2015 Malbec Rosé, Abv 12%

Bright pale pink in colour, this delightful rosé has a nose that presents subtle, fresh aromas of red fruits such as cherries, strawberries and raspberries. The palate is light, fresh, fruity and nicely balanced with a persistent and pleasing finish, a very easy wine to drink as an aperitif. This is the perfect chicken wine and a charming companion to mildly spicy Asian cuisine. Keep one in the fridge at all times and you'll always have a delicious wine to enjoy with light snacks and cheeses. €9.50

### 2012 Merlot, Abv 14%

Intense cherry red in colour with aromas of fresh red fruits such as cherries along with a subtle note of herbs and spices that lend complexity. The palate is fresh and fruity with medium structure and friendly tannins that lead to a pleasing and well-balanced finish. Served at room temperature, it will partner well with grilled pork loin, roast lamb or tomato based dishes. €9.50

### 2014 Cabernet Sauvignon, Abv 13%

Intense ruby red with a violet hue. This is a fresh wine with some complexity and intensity of aromas on the nose aromas of fresh red fruits, cherries and cassis, strawberries and raspberries, plums with a subtle spicy note. The medium-bodied palate is fresh and fruity with good balance and nicely rounded tannins. The bold fruit flavours are a great match with spicy curries or tomato based pasta dishes. €9.50

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Chef Sayegh holds marijuana buds and THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol) and CBD (Cannabidiol) oils in his kitchen in Los Angeles

## California chef brings cannabis to fine dining

Cannabis may join the herb and spice rack in California kitchens as the most populous US state prepares for the possible legalisation of recreational marijuana in November.

Chef Chris Sayegh is leading the way by taking haute cuisine to a higher place with his cannabis-infused menus in private homes for as much as \$500 a head, or in 'pop-up' banquets around Los Angeles for \$20 to \$200 a person. For now, diners must show their medical marijuana cards.

Sayegh, 23, who cut his teeth in the kitchens of top restaurants in New York and California, said incorporating cannabis into his recipes

creates an entirely new consciousness for diners that goes beyond the effects of a fine wine.

"To me, this is a cerebral experience," he said during a demonstration at his Hollywood apartment last week. "You're eating with a different perception with each bite, with each course. You're literally changing your brain chemistry and you are viewing this food differently than you did five minutes ago, 10 minutes ago."

Marijuana has been legally permitted in California for medical purposes since 1996, and voters are widely expected to pass a measure on the

upcoming November election ballot to legalise pot as a recreational drug for adults statewide.

Sayegh said he began experimenting with cannabis cuisine after growing tired of pot-baked brownies and other snacks.

"It really wasn't until I started to break it down into a science that I realised that cooking with cannabis... was much, much different than baking with it," he said.

In the kitchen, Sayegh uses oil containing an extract of tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the psychoactive component of cannabis, and a "vaporiser" to infuse ingredients with

THC.

"You'll never taste the cannabis in my cooking unless I specifically want you to taste it because it's not a pleasant taste," he said, adding that he "micro-doses" his dishes to the desired potency of individual clients.

At his apartment last Friday he prepared an elaborate three-course meal for a friend. Carrot confit gnocchi with cannabis-infused pea emulsion was followed by New York strip steak with parsnip puree and a "medicated" red wine reduction. The finale: a sticky toffee pudding with toasted coconut and pot-infused chocolate.