

### Article Archive Links:

- [Show the Wines](#)
- [More for this Region](#)

#### Quick Links

- [What's New](#)
- [Weekly Wine Buys](#)
- [Gift Subscriptions](#)
- [Shop The Wine Advocate Store](#)
- [TWA Editorial Calendar](#)

#### Ratings On The Go

[Robert Parker Mobi](#)

#### More Information

- [Articles of Merit](#)
- [Cartoon of the Week](#)
- [Executive Wine Seminars](#)
- [WineAlert](#)
- [Glossary of Wine Terms](#)
- [The Vintage Chart](#)
- [The Wine Advocate](#)
- [Wine Education](#)
- [TWA Rating System](#)

#### Our Reviewers

- [Robert Parker](#)
- [Jeb Dunnuck](#)
- [Luis Gutierrez](#)
- [Monica Lerner](#)
- [Neal Martin](#)
- [Lisa Perrotti-Brown MW](#)
- [David Schildknecht](#)
- [Mark Squires](#)
- [Past Reviewers](#)

#### Links

- [Educational](#)
- [Retailer](#)
- [Accessory/Storage](#)
- [Other](#)

## The Newer Chile



*The Leyda Valley did not exist as a wine region until irrigation became available in the mid-1990s*

The New Chile (or the New Spain, the New France, the New Whatever...) has been used and overused, in institutional campaigns, in articles here and there, in slogans, more often than not describing or including what many of us consider not to be really that new anymore. "The new..." has become a *cliché* even though there really is a new Chile, not simply the same dog with a different collar (or the same one...). In fact, "newer" Chile features newer zones, newer producers, newer wines, newer directions... Lots of changes are happening there at the moment. Change is here and it's here to stay, for Chile and for the rest of the world. If anything, change is only going to accelerate. When you taste extensively, you taste these big changes (usually improvements!) happening from one vintage to the next. Take the De Martino wines from 2011; they represent a quantum leap from what the winery was doing before. It's a new De Martino. We have already read about MOVI and VIGNO from Neal Martin, and you'll read more about them here, not as a separate thing this time, but as an integral part of what is happening in Chile. And there's more: Chanchos Deslenguados, new coastal and mountain appellations, interest in warm climate grape varieties, people questioning old traditions and the status quo to do new things, investigations of terroir, and an increased interest in precision viticulture to discover new ways of understanding the vineyard as something to be preserved, not exploited, and everywhere renowned winemakers are branching out into small side projects... Some of that work is underway and some is still in the pipeline to be realized in forthcoming years.

Of course, we all have our simplified, stereotype images of regions or countries, more or less accurate, much as you might imagine a person you don't actually know; the mental image ultimately coincides (or not) with reality when you finally meet in person. To date, the stereotype of Chilean wines might not be the most exciting on earth, so I approached it with an open mind, trying to overcome my phobias and philias I am trying to understand, to learn, and look for the positive side of things. For that, I know nothing is better than meeting the people and seeing the places. As with Argentina, I cannot go everywhere, meet everybody or taste all the wines immediately. I'd rather do things slowly, little by little, and what I cannot see or do this time I will do or see next year or the year after, or the one after that... This is just my first bullet.

Again, I'm not going to talk all about Chilean wine from scratch. My report takes over where Neal left off last year and looks ahead rather than back.

### Outer Limits: Crossing the Lines

Even if we don't start from scratch, we need to have a foundation to be able to explain what is happening today and what will happen tomorrow. Santiago has 8 million inhabitants out of Chile's total population of 15 million. In the old times, the vineyard locations were dictated by convenience rather than optimal conditions: the wineries and vineyards were all close to Santiago, as that was where most of the winery owners lived. They never ventured into places like Maule, Cauquenes, Itata or Biobío, simply because they were too far from Santiago. These distant zones were relegated to the peasants who lived there and who were very poorly paid for the grapes they cultivated.



*The city of Santiago is swallowing up some of the historical vineyards from Alto Maipo, like this one from Cousino Macul*

Even within commuting distance from Santiago, new places started popping up: Leyda did not exist as a wine region until the mid-1990s, when irrigation became a reality in a place that was almost a desert. Further south than Biobío, Malleco was developed by Viña Aquitania, and in the north, up from Limarí, Elqui is a very recent addition to the wine map. I only tasted a handful of wines from this northerly appellation, but what I saw was exciting. Choapa is still in its infancy, but it covers the big gap between center and north. And really crossing the line, Ventisquero has ventured into Atacama, where the driest desert on earth is found, to develop its Tama line. Some regions where the grapes grown in the past were destined for the production of pisco, a wine distillate liqueur, are now (slowly) being turned into quality wine sources that take advantage of very old and perfectly adapted vineyards planted mainly with Moscatel and Pedro Ximénez. I should, with time, visit these regions in the future and report back in more depth about what is happening there. For some it might still be too early, there are few projects and not many wines are available. Marcelo Retamal from De Martino has a small project in Elqui, but he was not yet ready to show me the wines. By the way, I stole the outer limits title from a line from Montes, where they explore new zones and go beyond mainstream viticulture and oenology. Keep an eye on those outer limits...

### **Mapping the Valleys: Becoming Specific**

Let's do some wild simplification to explain how wine regions are evolving. Other than the new zones I have just mentioned, the old existing ones are also being redrawn, sliced up into smaller chunks to become more specific. Chile is a long strip of land with the Andes Mountains on the east and the Pacific Ocean on the west. In many places there is an additional mountain range closer to the ocean, the coastal range. Rivers, and therefore valleys, originate in the Andes and move west toward the ocean. The big diversity of terroir and climates is created by the proximity of the ocean and the altitude and influence from the Andes as you move east, so three different subzones were defined:

–The **coastal** zone, closer to the sea with an important marine influence.

–**Entre cordilleras**, literally 'between mountain ranges', the central zone between the coastal and the Andes ranges where flatlands abound and temperatures tend to be warmer.

–**Andes zones** where the influence of the Andes Mountains is greater and altitude can be higher even though not many high altitude vineyards have been developed yet.



*The Andes Mountains leave their imprint in the wines from Chile.*

If the viticulture focus in the past was on the central zone, wineries are now looking for cooler regions, closer to the sea or to the mountains, where vegetative cycles are longer and you can play with humidity and altitude. Any given valley can be sub-divided into these three sub-regions, creating new, smaller and more defined appellations of origin. These are the main wine valleys, from north to south:

**1) Northern regions**

Elqui  
Limarí  
Choapa

**2) Aconcagua Regions**

Aconcagua  
Casablanca  
San Antonio

**3) Central Valley Regions**

Maipo  
Cachapoal  
Curicó  
Maule

**4) Southern Regions**

Itata  
Bío-Bío  
Malleco

New appellations can be created for one given valley; for example, Aconcagua could be divided into Aconcagua Costa, Aconcagua Entre Cordilleras and Aconcagua Andes. In reality not all three subzones exist for every valley, and this is still work in progress, but some of the appellations already exist and have started to appear on labels. I think this will develop further, so let's stay

here this time round and see how things are in the next review of Chile in 14-16 months.



*Colchagua is slowly climbing up the hills like this Syrah vineyard from Montes.*

### Is Carignan the New Carmenère?

Now that we've reviewed the regions, let's take a look at the grapes. I don't think Chile needs to find a flagship grape to emulate what has happened in Argentina with Malbec. In fact, the dominance of Malbec can be dangerous, as it risks becoming a commodity to be produced anywhere, not necessarily Argentina. I've seen that in places that have centered their viticulture strategy on a single grape variety, be it Rueda with Verdejo or Navarra with Merlot. I believe the strength of Chile is in diversity - diversity of varieties as well as climates and regions. Why select one when you can have many? In fact, I believe Chile has more potential for diversity than Argentina. Even if the focus was once on Santiago, it is not anymore; Chilean wine is no longer defined by production in a small region in the way that Argentina is mainly about Mendoza. Going back to the grapes, some thought Carmenère should become the Malbec of Chile. Carmenère is a difficult grape, not suited for all places - or all tastes! Nor is any other grape, of course, but we are saying that there's no need to focus on just one variety. That said, there is one grape gaining traction by the minute, and believe it or not, it is Carignan. Carignan, better known by its French name despite being a Spanish grape originally named Cariñena in Spanish, arrived in Chile some 60 years ago from France with its French surname. Its arrival was meant to improve País grape wines by adding color to the cheap País-based blends, and it was used this way for 60 years. Carignan was abandoned and almost forgotten except for some surviving vines intermixed with País plantings in Maule until the early 1990s when a group of producers started crafting fine wines with it. They discovered that the granitic soils of Maule and the old, dry-farmed vineyards produced fresh wines with incredible acidity and low pH. Interest in these wines spread, and by the mid- to late 1990s, the first Carignan wines appeared in the market. This eventually led to the official creation of Vigno (short for Vignadores de Carignan) as recently as on November 18, 2011. Vigno is a pun on the Spanish word for wine, vino, and the name of the grape, Carignan, borrowing its 'G' at the center point of the name. As a grower's association, Vigno promotes wines made with old Carignan from Maule, wines produced according to the rules of what they call the first real appellation of origin in Chile. Vigno stipulates that the Carignan vines have to be over 30 years old (original or re-grafted on old País vines) and head-pruned, and that the vineyards must be dry-farmed. The finished wines must also have at least 65% Carignan in the blend, with the rest made up of traditional varieties from old-vines from the region, and never sold earlier than two years after the harvest.



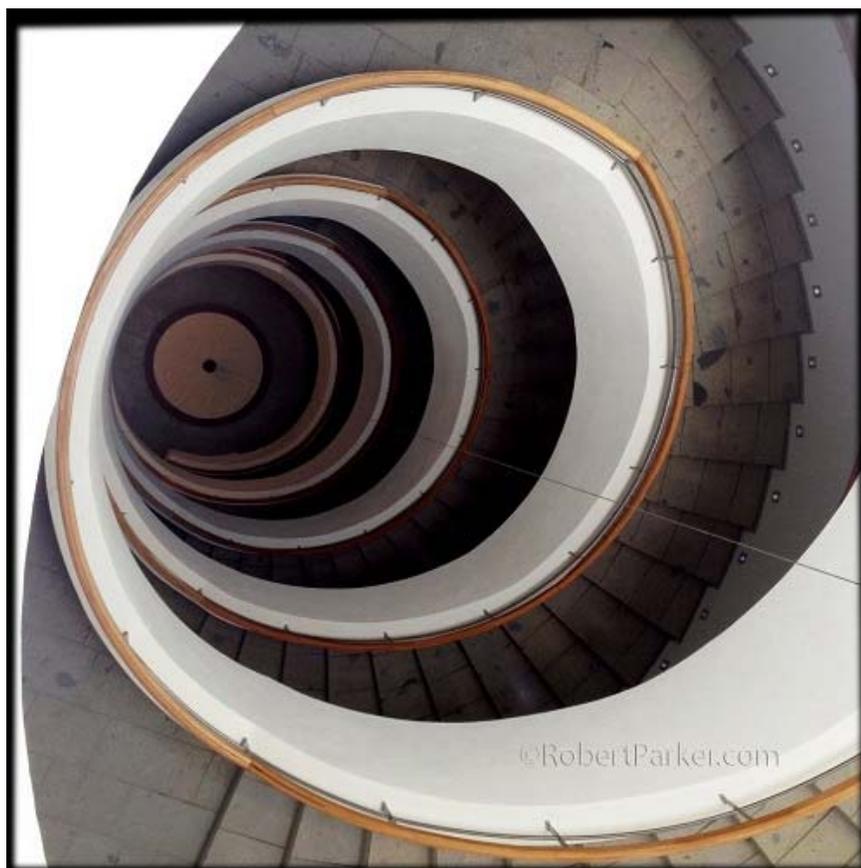
*VIGNO, promoting Carignan. Old vine, un-grafted, dry-farmed... and full of character!*

Carignan is not the only way, it just another way. And if Carignan makes sense... what about other warm-climate grape varieties?

### **Mediterranean Varieties: Here Comes the Sun!**

I was surprised to meet so many people who explained that despite how many regions in Chile had a warm climate - call it Mediterranean if you like - there were few Mediterranean grapes - call them warm climate grapes if you like - in Chile because the vines and viticulture were dominated by French people who brought mainly Bordeaux grapes with them, irrespective of climate, soil, conditions, etc. Today, perhaps because of Vigno's revival of Carignan, many are turning their interest to Grenache (Garnacha) and Mourvèdre (Monastrell). Nowadays, even the reviled País is becoming mainstream, and very welcome to be there too! It's not only the Chanchos Deslenguados producing wines with País anymore; Torres started with a sparkling wine and then produced a red, Reserva de Pueblo (included in this article), and Concha y Toro has a label from the Frontera Specialties line - a fun and affordable line I should investigate next time - from 2013, La Negra País that I didn't get to taste formally but that I had the chance to drink with the Chanchos Deslenguados themselves!

GSM is a common acronym now for Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre, and a few varietal examples are included here. I tasted an impressive Mourvèdre from Lapostolle and found a number of Mediterranean grapes as components of blends or part of the already mentioned Outer Limit series from Montes. It makes sense to have Mediterranean, warm-climate grapes, in warm-climate regions, doesn't it? Sometimes common sense (the least common of all the senses) makes for revolutionary ideas!



*The spiral staircase at the impressive gravity-driven Lapostolle winery in Apalta. Don't miss their Collection Mourvèdre!*

Of course, Cabernet Sauvignon reaches world-class limits on the terraces of the Maipo River, and some Chardonnays like Sol de Sol or Talinay are superb. I do not object to those grapes at all, but in the same way I don't want all of Spain planted with Tempranillo, I don't want standardization, and the same grapes in all the regions of Chile! The same way as people are convinced Casablanca or Elqui are better suited for cool climate grapes, the warmer places are ideal for grapes like Carignan, Moscatel, Cinsault, Grenache or Mourvèdre. As a curiosity, the most popular grape in MOVI at the moment seems to be Syrah. That's diversity, my friends...

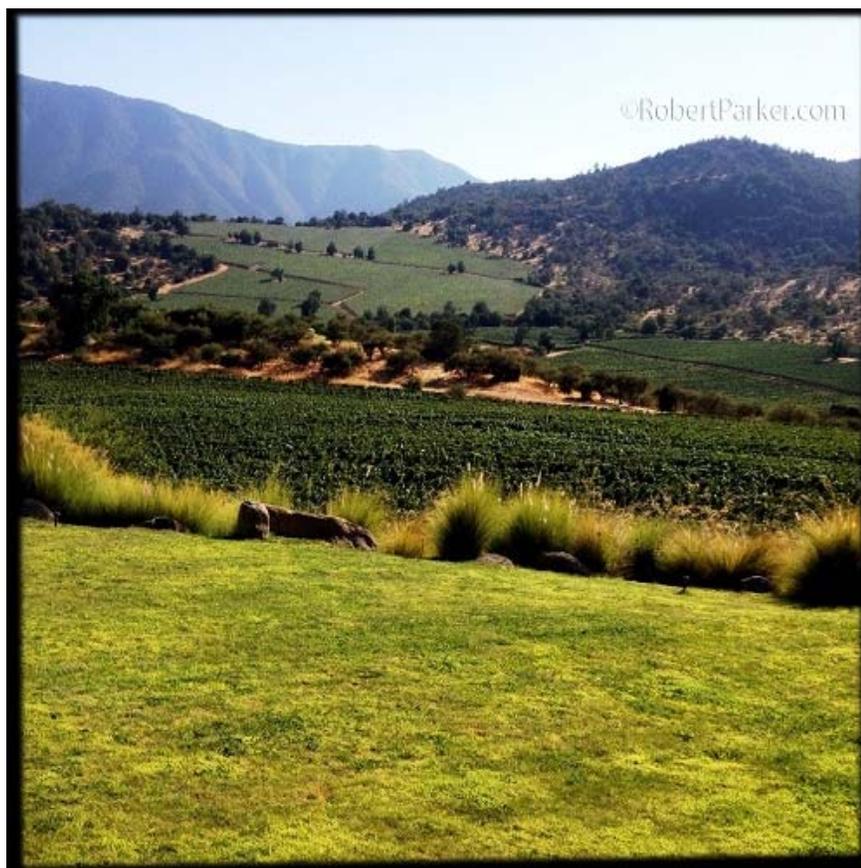
### **Terroirism**

I'll tell you about the day I met another person who I think is vital in this new(er) Chile. After tasting a fair amount of Chilean wines in Madrid, thanks to winemakers traveling to Europe and stopping here, as this is the best connection between Santiago and the old continent, I set out to see the place and visit some of the valleys. I do not believe in coincidences, coincidences do not exist, you either work for it or it's called destiny. As preparation for my first trip to Argentina and Chile, I talked to many people, through email, Facebook, Twitter or WhatsApp. I was having an exchange with Pedro Parra, to arrange meeting times and so on, and he happened to be in Spain. Parra is an expert on soils who consults (or has consulted) for most of the big names in Argentina or his homeland, Chile. He's also a partner in Altos las Hormigas in Mendoza, Argentina and in Clos des Fous in Chile (more about him in the intro to Clos des Fous). He had been visiting Rioja and wanted to have some more time to discuss the terroirs of Rioja (both Spain and Argentina, I guessed!), Chile and Argentina. We were looking for a way to have more time and he asked me if I was in Mendoza already. I told him I was leaving in a few hours. He said he'd be at Madrid airport that night; he was going back to Chile. And of course, I was going to Mendoza through Santiago, we were on the same flight! We managed to get seats together and from there on it was non-stop, talking about Bierzo, Galicia, Rioja... and of course, Chile and Argentina. That's how I met Pedro Parra. We talked about soils, Burgundy, Chile, Argentina, Rioja, great wines, rock and roll, and a lot more for four hours, and then fell asleep. We woke for breakfast before landing in Santiago. Quite a nice transatlantic trip! Some of the things Pedro said stayed in my mind, like his explanation of the different layers of soil, and how people waste their time looking at the topsoil. "The first 70 centimeters of the soil, well, that's the McDonalds of the vines, where they eat what they should not be eating... It's deep down, one and a half meters and further down where the real terroir is."



*Pedro Parra is a soil and vine consultant and partner in projects like Clos des Fous and Aristos*

Something very important that I learned from him is that most of the greatest vineyards in Chile are planted on granitic soils. There's very little chalk to be found in Chile, but it does exist in specific locations in Limarí, Cachapoal, San Antonio, Elqui... Granite, chalk, alluvial, colluvial, slate or clay, it doesn't matter. What is important now is that people care about the soils and not whether the vineyards are within commuting distance from Santiago! As I mentioned in my article about Argentina, I have not been pushed into so many pits in my life to look at soils and roots as in that trip to Argentina and Chile. Parra is doing a great job identifying terroirs, helping wineries to understand their vineyards, to map their differences, to be able to do prêt-a-porter viticulture and vinification, to create terroir wines.



*There's a special light in Alto Cachapoal that is transmitted to the wines.*

### **Receding (Low Yields,) Maturity, Extraction and Oak**

We now have the places and the grapes, let's see what to do with them. If for ordinary wines high yields are a problem, for fine wines excessively low yields are also a problem. This is part of the anti-formula. Excessively low yields mark wines and the wines can taste of low yields rather than the grape or the place. However, in warm climates, the negative effect can sometimes be more intense, resulting in aggressive wines with harsh tannins that are far from being pleasurable and that are touted to be in need of time in bottle to be enjoyed, but that dry out before achieving balance, or remain monolithic throughout their lives without developing nuances, elegance or complexity: these wines are born monolithic, grow up monolithic and die monolithic.

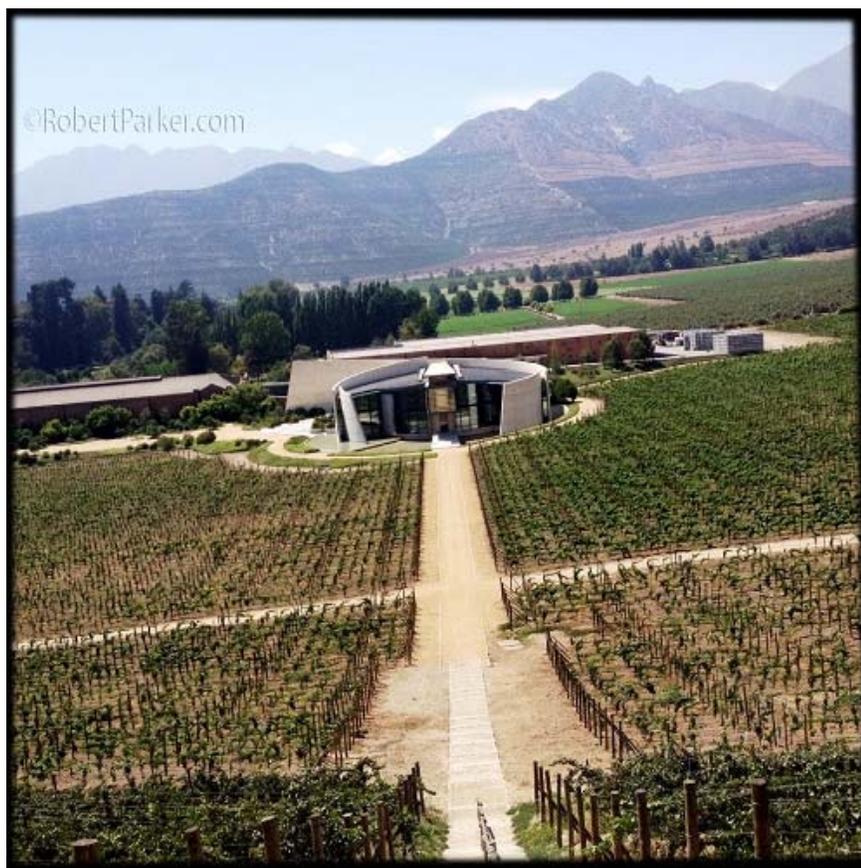


*The most modern is to rescue tradition. Centenary terracotta amphorae are being recovered. Viejas Tinajas...*

The (global) recession of maturity, extraction and oak is a (welcome) general trend throughout the world, and in warm climate countries like Chile and Argentina, they are also re-thinking low yields and irrigation to improve the balance of their vineyards and the quality of their grapes and hence their wines. Despite the risk of sounding like a broken record (now that vinyl is in again!), beware, let's not go to the other extreme with yields, maturity and extraction. My beliefs can be summarized in three words: balance, diversity and no-formula. OK, no-formula is not a word, but it's a simple concept: if wines are produced following a formula, if operations are applied regardless of vintage and wine, if winemaking and aging is systematic and repetitive, the wines tend to be deprived of their character and origin, grape and vintage tend to get erased and to produce similar and repetitive wines.

### **A Word on Viticulture**

I think viticulture needs a special mention. I was shocked to learn most vineyards in Chile do not see their 20th birthday, they die young. Only the old, deeply rooted vineyards survive. Someone gave me a terrifying fact: between 1996 and 2000, the surface planted with vineyards doubled. I cannot recall who it was, but basically he said there are two Chiles (for wine), one pre-2000 and another one after that. When discussing why the vineyards die young (nematodes, illnesses, over cropping...), Michel Friu, technical director at Almaviva, who has previously worked for Clos Apalta, told me something that made me think and that I believe summarizes the situation very well: "In Chile we have tried to produce great wines. Now it's time to create great vineyards."



*Errázuriz is the quality leader of Aconcagua. This is their impressive winery and vineyards.*

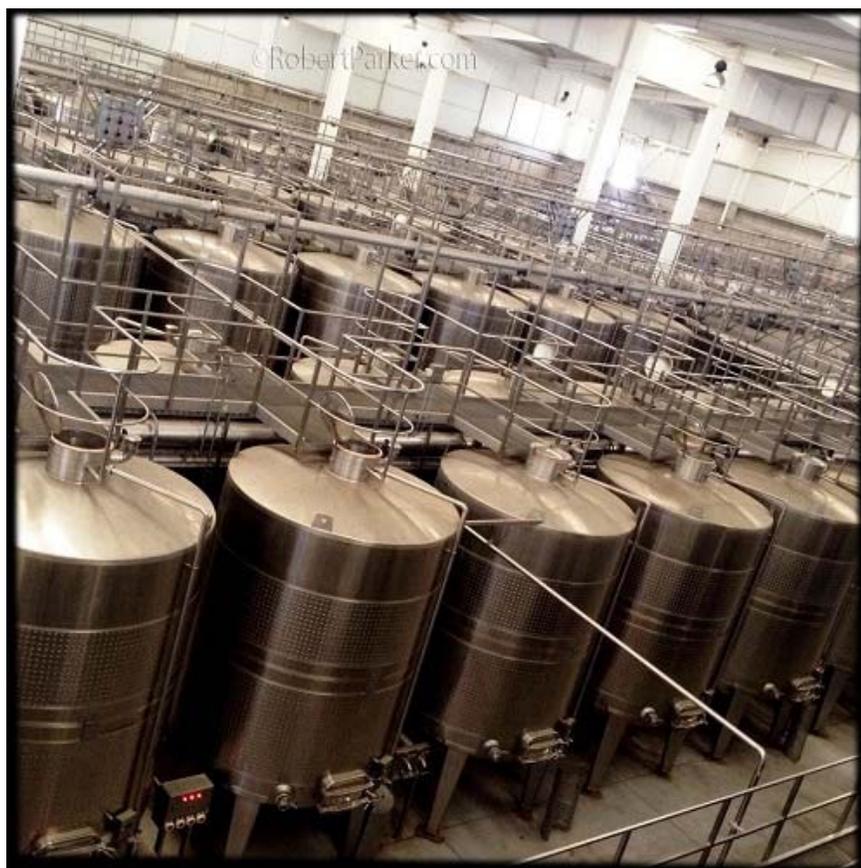
If flatlands, high-yielding and warm places were favored when quantity and costs were more important than quality, there is a renovated interest in slopes, coastal and mountain zones and the advantage of having the influence of the sea and the cooler temperatures and the wider thermal difference of the mountains. If at one point viticulture was almost exclusively massive and industrial, it's slowly turning to more diverse and quality-focused. One of the problems with the old approach was that over-exploited vineyards could hardly live more than 20 years. Most of the intense-viticulture vineyards were literally irrigated and fertilized to death. It's not the problems of illnesses, phyloxera or nematodes - which are also culprits - it's a matter of killing the golden goose! Today the most advanced producers are looking back at their vineyards and realizing viticulture has to change. And the change is already happening, slowly, but happening.

### **Young Blood and a Look at the Past**



*Cement is making a comeback, in traditional or egg shapes.*

Of course, none of this can happen without people. People are the most important link and the ones who make things happen (or not). I met with the Chanchos Deslenguados, who I've mentioned before, at an informal meeting of small producers, mostly from Maule, whose spiritual leader is Louis Antoine Luyt (who unfortunately didn't show up). I had the chance to meet, talk and drink some brilliant wines with people who are passionate about their vineyards, about their *terroir* and who are mostly oblivious to the commercial world of wine. It was really refreshing and fun. I don't really want to start classifying producers and saying whether they are MOVI (which only means they are small, and small can be good or bad, the same as big can be good or bad), or Chanchos Deslenguados, etc.



*No, no! They are not all boutique wineries...*

You'll find them all mixed in the article; they are just part of Chile's current picture, not separate entities. It's impossible not to identify Vigno producers as such, as it's the main brand for all the wines produced following their rules. But more than groups, there are individuals behind these wines. There's young blood; some of the large wineries have turned to young winemakers who are updating their viticulture, practices and wines like Rafael Urrujola at Undurraga or Rodrigo Soto at Veramonte. Large, traditional wineries like Santa Carolina, under the guidance of its head winemaker Andrés Caballero, are investing in research projects to recover past traditions and develop new products. Other people who are important in making this change happen are winemakers like Marcelo Retamal from De Martino (perhaps the spiritual leader of this whole revolution), Marcelo Papa from Concha y Toro, and so many others. You'll have to read the introduction to the tasting notes of the wineries to read about them all.



*Marcelo Retamal head winemaker from De Martino getting hands-on. He's one of the leaders of change.*

### **Vintage, What Vintage?**

It's inevitable that we talk about vintages, one of the wildest simplifications that we make in the wine world. I go crazy with detailed weather reports and so much data that you can't see the forest for the trees, so I'll make my own wild simplification and try to explain and classify vintages depending on whether they are warmer or cooler than average. You can then decide if you prefer wines from cooler or from warmer vintages or, as it happens... it depends! But let's go! This is distilled to the minimum from reading a few detailed harvests reports, talking to a lot of people and tasting some wines from older vintages (most of them not included in the article) that I tasted in order to understand context for some producers, wines and regions.

**1996** was slightly cool with some rain during the harvest.

**1999** was very dry.

**2005** was a great vintage, especially in Puente Alto, in Alto Maipo. A powerful, ripe vintage.

**2006** was a cool vintage that has aged very well.

**2007** was relatively average (not too warm, not cold).

**2008** must have been a bit of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as some people talked about a very warm vintage and others explained it was a cooler and wetter year, with plenty of clouds and moderate weather. But how can we generalize such big country into one line? That's why!

**2010** had a fresh spring, a little delay in harvesting dates, but a very good summer when grapes ripened slowly. It was a cold vintage, especially after the earthquake.

**2011** was one of the coldest vintages in recent times, cooler than 2010 and with a later harvest. Many people mentioned it as their favorite vintage.

**2012** had extreme drought and warm conditions.

**2013** was very cold (even colder than 2011) but with higher yields.



*RE is the NEW project from the Morandé family. These are their unusual pear-shaped (or are they pregnant women?) vats.*

### **Name Dropping**

Everything I have mentioned in the previous paragraphs translates into names in the tasting notes in this report. You'll find them all there, all sorts of wines, from large to small producers, expensive and cheap wines, from different places and different grapes. Scores are important, but to me there's something more important. Now that the weather is starting to change in Europe and the summer is almost here as I write these lines, the wine I really wish I had with me is the Aupa Pipeño from Maitia, a wine of thirst, bottled exclusively in magnum. Just thinking of it makes me salivate! This winery is an example of a very small producer making exciting wines off the beaten path, interpreting traditional País and Carignan grapes in a new way. You'll find plenty of new names. Many of the top scoring wines and wineries in this article had never appeared in *The Wine Advocate*, so we're talking truly new: Bodegas RE, Clos des Fous, Ribera del Lago, Gandolini, Calyptra or Montsecano. Some others might as well have changed their names, as their wines have nothing to do with what they produced in the past, De Martino, Undurraga, Tabalí... So Chile can be new(er), exciting and diverse. Welcome to the future.

I tasted all these wines thanks to the time and generosity of many during the past 12 months, in Madrid and in Chile.



*Tasting, tasting, tasting...*

—Luis Gutierrez

eRobertParker.com<sup>SM</sup> is a service of The Wine Advocate, Inc  
Email: [info@erobertparker.com](mailto:info@erobertparker.com)  
Copyright © 2001-2014 - The Wine Advocate, Inc.

*Except as otherwise expressly permitted under the [Subscription Agreement](#) or copyright law,  
no copying, redistribution, retransmission, publication or commercial exploitation of this material is permitted  
without the prior written consent of The Wine Advocate, Inc.*