

## Chile: Think Outside the Box

December 31, 2015

Chile is a thin strip of land over 4,000 kilometers long, plus a handful of islands and a further 1.2 million square kilometers of ice. The grape-growing zone is approximately 1,000 kilometers long, although you can probably still go further south and north. In the north the problem is lack of water and in the south it's the intense cold. I hear about some vines planted inside the crater of one of the volcanoes on the Easter Island and the intention to try and make some wine from those plants. It looks like someone seems to be considering the Atacama Desert for vines, although there's no talk of any ice wine yet! So in the future, I might have an excuse to visit these gems, but so far I've limited myself to the Continental Chile, but not necessarily on the beaten path.



*Welcome to Chile!*

I'll try not to repeat myself too much (although some level of repetition is needed when you want ideas to permeate...), so let me refer you to my initial **article on Chile** from June 2014 for more background info on regions, vintage conditions, etc.

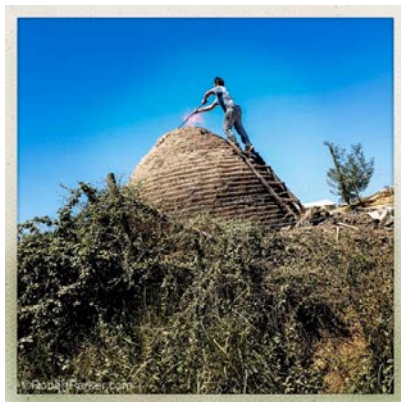
Around half of the 18 million population of the country lives in Santiago, the capital city. The second largest city is Valparaiso, which does not reach one million, and third is Concepción, in the Bío-Bío region with roughly 700,000 inhabitants. For such a vast extension of land (750,000 square kilometers), almost as much as Spain and Italy together, the density of population is very low, meaning that most of the country is almost empty.

I don't spend my time in hotels tasting all day long. I go out to the vineyards and hardly ever set foot in wineries. Once you leave the large cities, you hardly see any villages. There are scattered houses here and there, but very few actual villages. The Pan-American Highway, called Ruta 5 in Chile, crosses the country from north to south (well, it actually crosses the continent from north to south...), but once you leave it, you're often on dirt tracks.



*Old adobe bricks, just mud and straw*

When you are in the countryside you realize how important adobe was, and still is, in construction. Most of the houses were built with adobe, and they needed the weight of the roof tiles for stability, but that same weight is what kills them when the land moves and makes them fall down. Nowadays, many old buildings have been destroyed by earthquakes and abandoned, and you see a lot of prefabricated houses and shacks built with plastic and whatever material people can get their hands on. I also drove past a number of large adobe ovens used to make coal from *espino* hawthorn wood, which is very dense and makes coal with good heating value. Rusticity, adobe and hawthorn coal...



*Making hawthorn coal in large adobe ovens*

## **Let the Adventure Begin!**

Last year I only scratched the surface of the wine country, and even without context I already sensed something special in the wines from the south. This time my visit to the Bío-Bío, Itata and Maule valleys was really eye-opening. That's where the past is ... and possibly the future too!



*I taste in advance and use my trips to visit vineyards*

In the last couple of months, I have sat down with dozens of Chilean winemakers to discuss wines and winemaking, I've tasted hundreds of wines in Madrid to be free of that task when on site. I walked a fair amount of vineyards in the country, met with people and got the feeling of the places, to put context to what's in the bottle, mostly in regions I hadn't had time to visit last time. It's now time to put pen to paper and scribble my thoughts and conclusions about what I found in the bottles and about that context. There's so much to say, I probably tasted close to 900 wines and travelled the country for two weeks nonstop, met and talked to countless people. If I had time I could probably write a book. Where to start...

We need to summarize, simplify and give some general ideas to help understand the complexity of what's going on there. In that spirit, I'd say there are three main tendencies that were noticeable:

- Great focus in the south
- Increasing interest for Mediterranean grape varieties
- Improvement in Pinot Noir

Of course, there are many more things, like the explosion of smaller projects and different grower's associations, the move towards more drinkable wines with less excess, the journey towards rationalization of viticulture, the search for identity and *terroir*, the exploration of higher altitudes, coastal and cooler zones, and the push to get rid of that image of cheap (industrial) and cheerful wines that is still quite prevalent among consumers. In general, I would say the moment of change in which the Chilean wine scene is currently submerged is really interesting. Some might think this is a revolution, but for me it's an evolution of what I found in my previous visit. Let's see...

## Great Focus in the South

There is a 1985 album from Spanish singer Joan Manuel Serrat with lyrics inspired by Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti titled *El Sur También Existe*, The South Exists Too. I was tempted to use its name for the title of my article, but as I was writing I realized that there's more than just the south. Focus is no longer exclusively on the Santiago circle of influence, the imaginary box of the commutable distance from the capital. Many are travelling north and south, really thinking outside the box, leaving preconceived ideas, moving away from the mainstream, rethinking what kind of wine they want to make.



*Updated tradition: new adobe*

There is a search to find the real character of the regions and what wine can be produced in each of them beyond planting the same varieties and applying a formula that obviously doesn't work everywhere. In many cases there is no need to reinvent the wheel, it's enough to stop and look back, try to understand old traditions, zones and varieties, and look at them through the glasses of modern knowledge and technology, and come up with an updated version of the past. Back to the future again, guys.



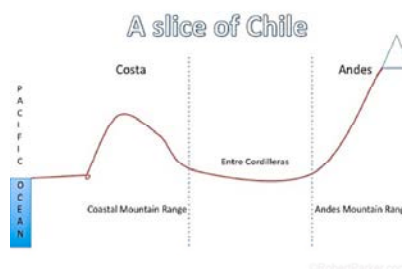
*I saw some experimentation with the shape of concrete vats, like these spherical ones.  
Beyond the egg...*

Itata, Bío-Bío and Maule together form the cradle of Chilean viticulture. Simply because it was the region with natural conditions for growing vines, there was enough water and no irrigation was needed. There was also enough sun for the grapes to ripen properly, and on top of that it was pest free, there was no phylloxera, oidium or other maladies. That's where Chile's wine was born with the plants brought in by the Spanish in the 15th century for nurturing and religious purposes. The south provided wine for the whole country, from the Maule to the north and Itata and Bío-Bío to the (further) south. The Jesuit Monks identified Maule as the perfect zone for dry farming where they planted their vines to produce wine for mass with País grapes (the grape brought to the continent by the Spanish), a grape originally called Listán Prieto, a grape from Castilla that has basically disappeared and can still be found in very small quantities in the Canary Islands. In America, it spread and took different names, Mission, País, Criolla Chica... The rest of the grapes came later. Yes, the south, but before that let's review something important...

## Costa and Andes

That thin strip of land I mentioned at the beginning is far from being flat. It's framed from north to south by two important mountain ranges: one close to the Pacific Ocean, the *cordillera de la costa*, older and not as high, and the Andes to the east that form the border with Argentina. A number of rivers are born in the Andes and find their way to the sea. They form the wine valleys that we've always heard about, the Aconcagua Valley, the Maipo Valley, the Maule Valley...

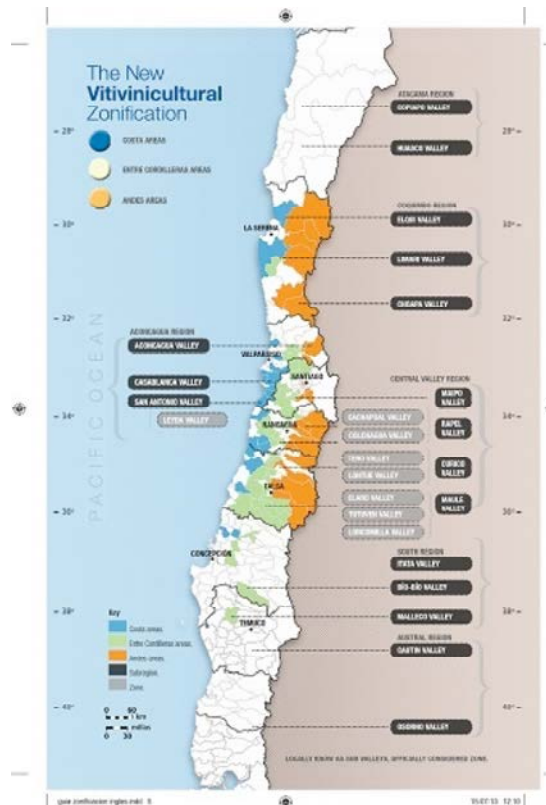
These valleys are often large and/or diverse. So the idea was to separate and define the coastal and mountain zones of the valleys, to highlight and separate them from the central part, the valley floor, the zone boxed (pun intended!) in between the two mountain ranges where most of the intensive viticulture is found... So separate, official appellations were created as subdivisions of most valleys and named them Costa and Andes. Costa and Andes are two words that are recognizable internationally. Smart...



*A slice of Chile showing the Costa and Andes appellations within the wine valleys*

From a geological and climate point of view it makes a lot of sense. The soils are usually rich in slate closer to the sea, then more or less decomposed granite as the coastal range declines, moving to richer, deeper soils with more clay in the lower part valley, and again more granite and perhaps alluvial/colluvial elements mixed with volcanic rocks as you start going up the Andes mountains. The climate also varies west to east from cooler to warmer and cooler again as you travel from the ocean to the Andes. In fact, many think the appellation systems makes more sense in a vertical way, separating Costa, Entre Cordilleras and Andes rather than horizontally by valleys as it is now.

The Costa appellations are defined by temperature, and the Andes mostly by altitude and influence from the mountains, from data extracted from an old study - but there's also an important correlation between altitude and temperature. I already mentioned this last time, but the concept has not developed much. Perhaps the inclusion of the blurry concept of Entre Cordilleras in the last minute didn't help. There is a lack of good maps to show these different parts/appellations. The maps I'm showing here might be far from being perfect, they follow political divisions of communes rather than geological/climate zones and a significant number of vineyards are outside the boundaries drawn, but at least they are a first step towards a new clarification and understanding of the *terroir* in Chile wine. These maps and appellations are official and ratified by the Government, but not much is happening. Some growers are exploring cooler and higher zones, but as I see elsewhere there's little 'official' interest to define or separate much, to create any kind of hierarchy or classification...



*This map shows the new Costa and Andes zonification of the different valleys*

But let's remember that any form of vineyard or zone classification only defines the potential. It would set the quality ceiling that a vineyard or zone can reach, but it's not automatically reached. It depends on someone to realize (or kill) that potential. A skilled producer can deliver a better wine from a not so great place than a clumsy one from a superb vineyard. So don't get the simple idea that Costa or Andes are automatically better. It's a lot more complex than that... Now let's refocus on the south.

## Maule

Let's get this straight: Maule is a very large region, close to 54,000 hectares of vineyards. That includes Curicó, as Curicó is, administratively, part of Maule. The Maule region is called the 7th region (Roman numerals are used, so VII), and it produces a lot of wine. It's important to understand that the administrative regions do not coincide exactly with the wine regions, and that might create some confusion. The Maule region includes the provinces of Cauquenes, Curicó, Linares and Talca. In the wine world the northernmost of the four provinces, and as such the warmest, Curicó, is often considered a separate valley, and Cauquenes, Linares and Talca are bundled into what we call the Maule Valley.



*Maule in spring*

I don't want to take you back to primary school, but as I didn't learn anything about the geography of Chile when I was a kid and my brief knowledge comes from the wine world, I needed to go back to square one to make pieces of the puzzle fit. Maybe this is a good opportunity to give a general idea of the geographical organization of Chile and how that fits with our wine world. The country is divided into 15 regions, numbered with Roman numerals from north to south with the exceptions that the Metropolitan Region of Santiago was created later and corresponded to the number 13 (XIII), so (could it be superstition?) it's not really called the 13th region, but rather *Región Metropolitana*. Two regions were added later on, so numbers 14 and 15 do not really follow the north to south logic and they mess up the order a bit. Anyway, regions are divided into provinces, and there are 54 of them, and those provinces in communes, totaling 346 of them. Some regions, provinces and communes are known to the wine world as they might coincide with wine valleys, appellations of origin or even brands used on labels.

Going back to the wine after yet another diversion, there are many different zones in the Maule, many for high yields, low price and high volume, thousands and thousands of hectares that contribute to anonymous cheap and cheerful blends. To put things in context, there's a lot of talk about the Carignan/Cariñena from Maule, from me included. Why? The buzz about it is because it's one of the most interesting and distinctive wines from the region and from the country. But do not believe Maule is all Cariñena...

There are 592 hectares of Cariñena in Maule but 16,800 of Cabernet Sauvignon and 7,500 of Sauvignon Blanc! There goes a large chunk of your volume! And most of the places are probably too warm for both grapes anyway. Yes, we're always talking about the top of the quality pyramid of wines, and volume is something else. The top of the pyramid is always small, but possibly even more so here. Locally, Maule has always had an image of bulk wine production, similar to that of La Mancha in Spain. That bulk wine image has dragged along the rest of the good vineyards, producers and wines. That's why many avoid the generic and somehow reviled name and go



for something more specific like Cauquenes. So Maule, yes, but where? I didn't understand when I asked about the differences about Itata and Bío-Bío and I was told, "it's the same!" What is important is WHERE in Itata, Bío-Bío... Maule and most other valleys!



*Old vines on the gentle slopes of Cauquenes*

The coastal, cooler parts and the higher altitude ones seem to be a lot more interesting, but a lot of the central part might be too warm. And maybe looking from a different angle, the statistics can also give us another hint. There are 6,500 hectares of dry farmed vineyards... and 47,000 of irrigated ones! The so-called *Secano Interior* is the non-irrigated land from the south of Curicó city to the Bío-Bío River. In vineyard terms, dry farmed land (*secano*) is usually found on granite slopes starting in the second line of the *Cordillera de la Costa*, therefore inland (*interior*). Here the soils have good drainage and the roots can go deep, there is enough rain for dry farming and there is still enough influence from the sea to make the temperatures a little lower, and with a good contrast between night and day. That's possibly where most of the higher potential is! In fact, most of the Vigno is sourced from Secano Interior vineyards. More about that later.



*Does it look like corn? Well it's granite, decomposed granite called maicillo (corn!)*

So part of the Maule (mostly Cauquenes), Itata and Bío-Bío have a lot in common, and it's not only...

## Pipeño

*Pipeño* is the most traditional style of wine from Chile. It was a very rustic wine, especially when produced with País grapes, which are rustic to start with. *Pipeño* wines are produced in the most traditional way. The grapes are foot trodden in baskets or the grapes removed from the clusters manually, literally being hit over a *zaranda*, a sort of grid that acts as destemmer and press. In the old times the *zarandas* were made of wood, but metal ones are used nowadays. The juice ferments in a *lagar*, an open vat usually made of wood. The wine is then kept in old large *raulí* wood barrels called *pipas*, hence the name of *Pipeño*. There was no mention of the grapes used, but people used the words *Chilena* to refer to the País grape they considered local, and *Burdeos* for a field blend that could include Malbec, Carignan, Cabernet Franc and/or Cabernet Sauvignon. White *Pipeño* was also produced, as *Pipeño* is a method or style.



*Pipeño produced using artisanal methods in the vineyard and the winery*

The wines were aimed at short term consumption; they had a short maceration and aging period, and were drunk before the new vintage arrived. These wines got a bad reputation, as many of them were not very good indeed or even a counterfeit mixture of bulk wine mixed with must, alcohol, sugar, even water and goodness knows what else, a deadly concoction. Some were perfectly sound and cheerful, and the family of Manuel Moraga Gutiérrez from Viña Cacique Maravilla in Yumbel, Bío-Bío, used to sell five-liter cans with labels and everything.



*David Marcel by the old País vines used for his Aupa Pipeño*

Jumping to current times, Cacique Maravilla together with Viña Maitía and their brand Aupa Pipeño were the first to succeed in the production of quality craft *Pipeño* wines bottled and labeled as such, as recently as 2013. I simply loved the 2013 Aupa Pipeño, so I was determined to find out more, see the vineyards and understand where the wine comes from. So I spent some time with Frenchman David Marcel who is the producer of the wine with his Chilean wife Loreto, from their small project called Maitía. Marcel comes from the French Basque Country and has been involved with wine in Chile for a long time. I tasted 2013, 2014 and 2015, and the 2013 is still drinking nicely and is developing a more balsamic profile. I'm not saying it's a *vin de garde*, but there's certainly no need to drink it before the newer vintage arrives.

Frenchman Louis-Antoine Luyt was a pioneer in the zone who started producing País wines and later labeling them as *Pipeño* too. He now has a range of village-designated *Pipeños*. What is important is that Luyt is also helping the grape growers to produce their own wines, a must for the survival of the traditions and the zone. A native Burgundian, Louis-Antoine Luyt is the spiritual leader of the 'natural' wine movement in Chile, already a cult figure in those circles. He worked for Philippe Pacalet, studied in Beaune, did five vintages at Marcel Lapierre in Morgon (Beaujolais). He brought that experience to the Maule, Itata and Bío-Bío valleys, where he's working with old vines and varieties like País, Carignan and Cinsault, often applying carbonic fermentation. Luyt has been a key person in the rebirth of the southern vineyards and traditions, in the recognition of País and *Pipeño* wines, a figure that transcends the quality of his wines. Unfortunately, he's been elusive, and I have not yet managed to meet him. He has an informative website and I'd recommend you dedicate four minutes to watch the excellent '**Vendimia Pipeño 2014**' video.



*Zaranda destemmer-crusher: zero-technology!*

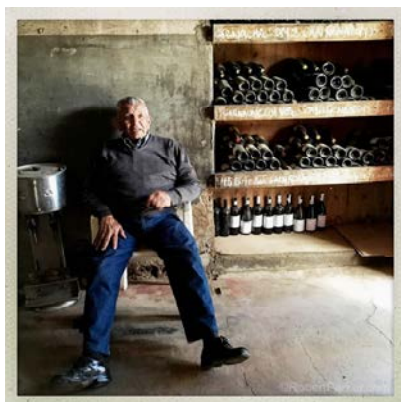
Now other young people are following, like Roberto Henríquez, who after working with Luyt for a couple of harvests has started to produce his own *Pipeños* under the name Ribera del Notro in the commune of Santa Juana in Bío-Bío. I hope more will follow.

## **Magic in Sauzal**



*Renán Cancino in his Sauzal winery*

The wines from El Viejo Almacén de Sauzal do not mention the word *Pipeño* on their labels but they are produced following the most orthodox traditions. Let me explain... Meeting Renán Cancino was one of the highlights of my trip. He's a quiet, reflective guy. He talks slowly and calmly. Someone described him as an endearing person, with a deep gaze and a voice that conveys a lot. Sauzal is a tiny village - population around 500 - in the province of Cauquenes (Maule) where Cancino grew up. Most of the old adobe houses from Sauzal were destroyed by an 8.8 intensity earthquake in 2010, the fifth largest ever to be recorded. The epicenter was in Maule, and more than 500 people died, most from the tsunami, and over a million people in Chile lost their homes.



*Renán Cancino's father in his old store that is now used as a winery*

But Renán's father's old shop (*Viejo Almacén*) still stands and is one of the smallest and certainly the most rustic and authentic winery I have ever seen. He might dress and feel like a *Huaso* (*Huaso* is the local name for a peasant), but he's a very smart guy, very knowledgeable about vineyards. His day job is as vineyard consultant for a number of large wineries. In 2012, he started producing and bottling small amounts of wine. He works the vineyards following all of the traditions: plowing with horses, doing everything by hand. The wines are produced the same way as they have been produced for hundreds of years, with no technology whatsoever, following the *Pipeño* traditions. No sulfur was ever used in the past, and he continues like that.



*Huaso de Sauzal, the wines from Renán Cancino*

His project is named *El Viejo Almacén de Sauzal* and he came up with the *Huaso de Sauzal* (the *Sauzal* peasant) brand for the wines. In 2014 he bottled a *País* (a grape that is locally referred to as *Chilena* as the locals think of it as THE grape from Chile), a *Carignan* that used to be part of *Vigno*, an association he left because his production is so small (12,000 bottles in total right now) he could not keep up with the pace of tastings and samples it demanded, and a *Garnacha*.



*Renán Cancino's 2014 production ready for shipping*

The three are excellent and highly recommended, and I wish I had more time with the wines to see how they develop. They were the *coup de coeur* from my trip! I hope I can see them during the harvest one of these years...

## ***Terroir and respect***



*Pedro Parra (left) and François Massoc, one of the most prolific teams in Chile*

It's impossible not to mention Pedro Parra and François Massoc, when the tandem are involved in many of the top scorers this year: their joint-venture with Liger-Belair called Aristos, the collective Clos des Fous with Paco Leytron and Albert Cussen, the new Pedro Parra y Familia, or the multiple projects where Massoc is in charge of the wines - mainly Calyptra and Pandolfi Price. Parra is one of the world's leading *terroir* experts and works with clients in Chile, Argentina, Italy, France, Oregon and Spain. I spent time with them and it's fascinating to go down into the roots of the vineyards to explore the soils and understand the potential of the zones. Having worked in so many regions, he's convinced the highest potential in Chile is in the south: Cauquenes, Itata, Bío-Bío and Malleco.



*Vine roots going through decomposed red granite*

I didn't make it to Malleco, but I had the chance to visit a number of other vineyards in Cauquenes, Itata and Bío-Bío, and the story was more or less the same: old head-pruned, dry farmed vineyards, mostly on soft slopes - a great part of Cauquenes is a succession of small slopes and hills worked by local *huasos* with zero technology on poor granite soils, plowed by horse and hand harvested. A few of them have been lucky enough to be found by people like Cancino, Luyt, Parra or Derek Mossman from the Garage Wine Co. who help them to take care of their vineyards, hire them or pay them a decent price for their grapes. People that show respect. Otherwise their work ends up in an anonymous blend from one of the industrial wine producers that pay them next to nothing.



*Plowing with a horse is the tradition in the old southern vineyards*

The problem with these vineyards and people is that the large operators have been paying some ten cents per kilo of grapes to the growers for years. At that price they can hardly make a living; they are poor and I don't think they aspire to great luxury, just a decent life. If they are not paid then there is the temptation to overproduce and do everything, re-graft to whatever variety is well paid (today Carignan grapes sell for roughly ten times more than País!), use productive clones, irrigate... or even worse, get rid of the vineyards and plant pine trees! Pine trees are very invasive and are

subsidized by the government to produce paper, and the paper industry is very strong. It's curious to hear how winemakers think of pine trees as a real threat for viticulture and the heritage of the old vineyards. So one of the solutions is to do what Renán Cancino has done, for the growers to start producing their own wines with a focus on quality.

País and *Pipeño* are a very small niches in the market, but the really hot category (albeit also small) is Carignan/Cariñena, thanks to... Vigno!

## The Land of a Thousand Earthquakes

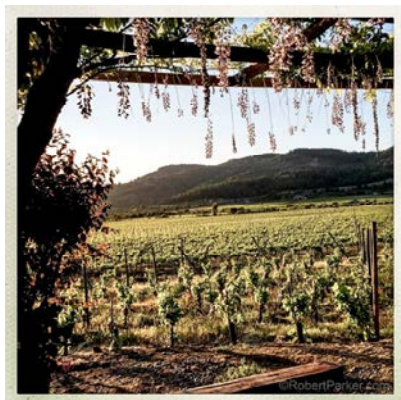
Chile is one of the hottest zones in seismic activity. In the two weeks I was there, there were dozens of tremors, but I didn't notice most of them. The sensation is like when you are in a building or a zone close to the underground and the underground goes past, and you hear the sound and notice a small vibration. But they call them *temblores* (tremors). A proper *terremoto* (earthquake) is when you cannot stand up straight; the quake is so strong that you fall down.



*Chile's countryside is speckled with old buildings destroyed by the 2010 earthquake*

After the 1939 earthquake where the epicenter was in Maule, which was highly destructive for the region, it was decided that they needed to bring a better variety than what they had, as until then it was almost all País. After some trips to France they decided on Carignan, as it produced good yields, had acidity and color. It all went to Maule and Itata, regions with enough rain to grow grapes. It was also a matter of being close to the Itata River, where ships arrived from Europe and the first stop after the Strait of Magellan, and therefore quite a convenient place for the commerce of the wines.





*Evening light in Maule*

That's how Carignan arrived in Chile under its French name, but it was not that widely planted, as it's quite susceptible to oidium... The grape was used for blending until Gillmore bottled the first pure Carignan in 1995. They had to ask for special permission, as the grape was not registered. Valdivieso and De Martino followed, but it was not until 2002 that there is a decree that allowed growers to label wines as Carignan. In 2010 Vigno was created. Vigno is, of course, the association of Carignan producers. It's an association that wants to go further than guarantee provenance, they have stricter rules, like most of the appellations in Europe: the wines have to have at least 65% Carignan from dry farmed and head-pruned vines, over 30-years-old, original or re-grafted on old País vines. The rest of the blend, if it's not pure Carignan, has to also be traditional varieties from old vines from the region. The wines are never sold earlier than two years after the harvest. The effect of the granite soils and the great temperature differences between night and day result in wines with a very low pH and great freshness while being powerful and true to their place and grape. The result? Well, the result is that while País grapes are sold at ten to 15 cents per kilo, while Carignan gets a dollar!

I had a spectacular tasting of all 15 Vignos, from all 15 producers, but unfortunately they were not all from the same vintage, as they are selling at different speeds. The number of members has increased and they are getting new members like Concha y Toro and Lapostolle! I poured all 15 wines in glasses and I followed the wines development in glass over some six hours, to check their evolution.



*Comparative tasting of all 15 Vigno bottlings existing today*

The charming and hard-working people at Gillmore are some of the few that actually live in Maule. I had the chance to visit a number of vineyards around their property as well as their own with Andrés Sanchez, who is also a founding member of both the Vigno and Movi associations. Their wines are always infused with the aromas of the wild flowers and herbs that speckle their fields, and they have crafted a magnificent 2012 Vigno; I'm really looking forward to their 2013 next time, because I had three aces from Vigno in 2013... I found some superb wines there like the 2013s of La Aguada from De Martino and the floral and ethereal example from Garcia+Schwaderer. The surprise arrived with a newcomer, the ultra-fresh 2013 Vigno from Lapostolle.

I've been talking mostly about the coastal part of Maule (very much mixed with Itata and Bío-Bío), but there's something I really liked from the higher altitude zone too...

## **A Rara Avis in Maule Andes**

Sauvignon Blanc is one of the most planted varieties in the country with some 15,000 hectares! Even if it's more of a cool climate grape and you'd expect to find it more in Casablanca, San Antonio or Leyda, there's quite a lot of it in the warmer Central Valley, and a surprisingly huge amount in the Maule region - although I suspect many of them are still the lower quality and high yielding Sauvignonasse, Sauvignon Vert or Tokay Friulano for which it was often confused. But looking at the different communes, there are six hectares of it in Colbún. Six hectares? Colbún? And why look at these six hectares? Let me explain...



*Vines by the Colbún Lake in the Maule Andes part*

Laberinto is the name of the unique project of Rafael Tirado. Unique because of many things, but mainly because he found a region off the beaten track by the Colbún Lake, the largest reservoir in Chile located in the commune of Linares in Maule, in a zone close to the Andes. The place receives many visitors and is a great place for water sports with many small wood lodges to rent; if you go there, I highly recommend Chez l'Habitant, where I stayed. His 18 hectares of vineyards are literally by the lake at some 600 meters altitude. His restless searching for ways to improve his wines, changing varieties, experimenting with *lenga* beech wood (a native tree grown mainly in Patagonia) for the aging of his wines, planted following different orientations and also the contour lines. He has even planted an actual maze (*laberinto*) of vines that name his wines and project. I wish I had time to walk it, but it takes 20 minutes to reach the center and a further 20 minutes to get out, and there's no shortcut!

All this, plus the characteristics of the place - the soil (volcanic) and climate, of course - makes them different and highly personal. *Trumao* is the local name for the volcanic soil found here and mainly in the south, named after the Mapuche word *Trumag* that refers to these same soils. Others are also using the word as part of their wines. Tirado has isolated the best blocks of *trumao* soils to produce his best white, from those volcanic ash blocks. Last year I named his Laberinto Sauvignon Blanc the best value in Chile, and I could probably name it again this year and the year after... It's quite unique and highly recommended, a wine that ages beautifully in bottle as I've been able to check a couple of times with the 2007 vintage.



*Laberinto Sauvignon Blanc, one of Chile's best values year in, year out*

What's unexpected is that Rafael Tirado has an identical twin brother... who is also a winemaker! Imagine how much fun they would have had studying at the university together! Anyway, Enrique Tirado currently works for Concha y Toro where he is responsible for the Don Melchor Cabernet Sauvignon from Maipo, plus the Gravas range, and the top wine from their project in Argentina, Eolo from the Trivento winery. Anyway, it was quite fun meeting them together to taste their wines, as last year I met Enrique first and when we finished he told me, "if you ever see me and I don't say 'hi' it's because it's not me. I have an identical twin brother!" I have now met them both, and as I've seen them together in the same room, I can guarantee there are two of them!

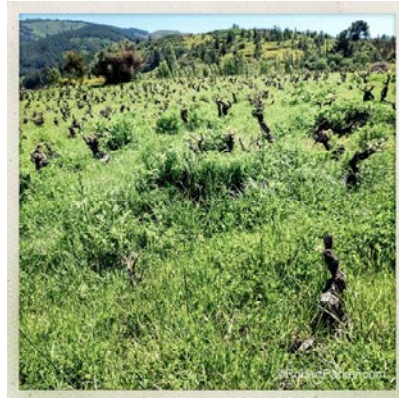


*Rafael Tirado (left) from Laberinto and Enrique Tirado from Concha y Toro*

## **Does Cinsault Exist?**

If Maule is still being sorted out, País and Pipeño are starting and Carignan/Cariñena is a little more established with Vigno, the situation in Itata and Bío-Bío is a little more disorganized. When researching for this article I tried to read opinions about Cinsault in Itata, when to my surprise... I found no references to it! Even in literature as recent and comprehensive as the 2012 tome *Wine Grapes* from Jancis Robinson,

Julia Harding and José Vouillamoz, there is no mention of Cinsault being grown in Chile.



*The Itata countryside was unusually green in the spring of 2015 (October) given the abundant and late rains.*

I started investigating and was quite amazed. In most of the places there was no mention of Cinsault in Itata! None of the statistics or texts that I found talked about the grape. But the fact is that the main red in Itata is Cinsault, and the white is Moscatel. I was there and I saw the vines. I visited a number of growers and vineyards, and all there was, was Cinsault and Moscatel! There is a mention in Wine Grapes of 'minor' Moscatel plantings in Chile. Statistics seemed really poor and unreliable, until I finally managed to get the official figures from the governmental SAG (*Servicio Agrícola y Ganadero*) that mention around 3,500 hectares of Moscatel in the country, most of them in Itata/Bío-Bío - a significant amount!



*Old Moscatel vines from Itata are easily recognizable because they are very low, pruned close to the ground*

The official figures talk about 616 hectares of Cinsault, but the real amount might be larger, as most of the old red vineyards in the south might be registered as País. That's why nobody knows about Cinsault from Itata. Well, nobody knows about Itata... yet! The zone, and that includes Bío-Bío too, has been mostly a source of

cheap grapes for volume blends.

So here most of the work is still to be done. I'm not sure if it's even work in progress or if it really has to start. In fact, I only tasted 30 wines from Itata, a region that has close to 8,000 hectares of vineyards, and a dozen from Bío-Bío, where Malbec seems to work pretty nicely. So the potential is enormous!



*A typical Itata landscape*

Curiously enough, País and Cinsault 'non-noble grapes' cannot produce appellation of origin wines, meaning wines produced with these two grapes cannot say Maule, Itata or Bío-Bío, they can only mention the special appellation *Secano Interior*. However, you can blend up to 25% of any variety or origin into any wine from any appellation in Chile and still be able to quote appellation and varietal on labels. Is that discrimination for País and Cinsault or what?

And now that we're on grape varieties it could be a good moment to mention the...

## **Increasing Interest for Mediterranean Grape Varieties**

If last time it was Carignan/Cariñena, this time it was ALSO other Mediterranean varieties, aka Garnacha/Grenache and Monastrell/Mourvèdre. I cannot say they are exploding (yet). At the last count there were some 133 hectares of Garnacha and 87 of Mourvèdre, but five years ago there were no more than 37 hectares of Garnacha and 58 of Mourvèdre, so the increase in percentage is relevant - especially in the case of Garnacha, despite the grape not being registered in the official *Decreto 464* that regulates wine regions and appellations of origin.



*The sun going down over Koyle's vineyards in the foothills of Colchagua*

Bodegas RE have a Garnacha/Cariñena field blend, Undurraga has a similar one in their TH (Terroir Hunter) range, and in the warmer Colchagua, Koyle are experimenting with Mediterranean varieties in their Andes property in Los Lingues. Lapostolle already stood out with their groundbreaking Mourvèdre from their very limited The Collection, a variety that probably adapts better to the natural conditions of the zone than cooler climate varieties.



*Steep slopes from Casa Marín four kilometers away from the sea*

And you don't find these varieties in warmer zones exclusively. The one project I didn't have time to visit in my first trip was Casa Marín in the coastal part of San Antonio, in the village of Lo Abarca. I had liked their fresh wines very much, so making use of a (free?) Saturday just before returning home, I ventured into their vineyards with Mari Luz Marín and her son Felipe. The vineyards are some four to five kilometers away from the Pacific Ocean. In fact, they claim to have the closest vineyard to the Pacific Ocean in the whole of South America. This allows them to produce a wide range of cool climate grapes - Sauvignon Blanc, Sauvignon Gris, Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Pinot Noir and Syrah - from their 46 hectares of vineyards planted on very varied soils, from granite to limestone, one of the few places in Chile to have limestone. I also wanted to check the development of some young Garnacha

they are using for a new and very promising cuvée of Garnacha and Syrah.



*An unusual young Garnacha vineyard from Casa Marín in Lo Abarca by the sea in the San Antonio Valley*

Quite a lot of people talked to me about clones, and they make different wines from different clones rather than different soils. Clones are certainly important. I've noticed an improvement in the quality of Pinot Noir, and they tell me it's partly because there is better plant material available. I'd say every small detail counts, and better and more organic viticulture, and a lighter hand in the winery are possibly as important or more so. I also saw the white Burgundian grape, Chardonnay, making steady progress. So here we go...

## **Burgundy Comes to Chile**

After tasting all of the wines individually by winery, I did a blind tasting of some of the top Chardonnays and most of the top Pinots as, especially the red grape, had surprised me and made me wonder how the wines would compare with top examples from other regions in the world. I selected some ringers from Burgundy and other regions in the world, and re-tasted them to confirm the impression that I had obtained tasting them separately. Pinot Noir has improved greatly in the past few years, and there are a few Chardonnays playing in the premier league. Newcomers that impressed in these two categories are: the Chardonnay Pizarras from Errázuriz, fine and elegant, mineral, sharp and austere in a Puligny way; and the top Pinot Noir bottling from Clos des Fous, Pucalan Arenaria and another Pinot, the Escaleras de Empedrado from Miguel Torres.





*I was thoroughly impressed with the 2013 Ocio, the top Pinot Noir from Cono Sur, a clear step up over previous vintages*

The highest scorer in the Pinot Noir category, though, is an old friend, the 2013 Ocio from Cono Sur, which I also tasted blind against a Grand Cru Burgundy and it didn't disappoint. The oak is less dominant than in previous vintages, but there is a high improvement in balance and elegance in the cool 2013, and if the wine still shows some oak and toast aromas, so would the top bottlings from Rousseau or Romanée Conti when young. Working with six million kilos of Pinot Noir certainly gives Cono Sur enough good grapes to make an ultra-selection and create this top scorer.

The helm of Chardonnay stays where I found it last year, in the joint venture between winemaker François Massoc, *terroirist* Pedro Parra and surprise, surprise, Burgundian Louis-Michel Liger-Belair. Although Liger-Belair works in the Château de Vosne-Romanée in the Côte the Nuits with reds, the three of them met in Burgundy while studying and have a clear Burgundian approach to *terroir* and wine, both red and white. Massoc and Parra are, together with their partners Francisco 'Paco' Leytron and Albert Cussen, known as Clos des Fous - a name I've just mentioned while talking about the top Pinots.

To complicate matters a bit further, Liger-Belair had been approached by Errázuriz before they knew he had his own project in Chile in search of advice for their wines from Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, and here comes their Chardonnay from slate soils in Aconcagua Costa making a lot of noise this year. I wanted to see those slate soils, a *terroir* that is often close to the coast and that is only starting to be explored by these Errázuriz wines and the Escaleras de Empedrado from Miguel Torres.



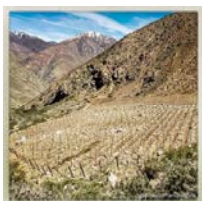
*Slate soils in Aconcagua Costa produce a new range 'Las Pizarras' from Errázuriz. Pizarra is the Spanish word for slate*

To close the circle, Martin Prieur from Jacques Prieur in Meursault has been a long time consultant for Cono Sur who have excelled with the 2013 Ocio. I'm sure they are not the only Burgundians working in Chile, but it's surely more than a coincidence that they are linked to the top Burgundian wines from the country...

## **Flying North**



As I hadn't been up north I also flew from Santiago to La Serena to visit the vineyards of Elqui and Limarí. These northern valleys have been suffering great droughts in the last few years.



*Carignan at 2,200 meters altitude in Alcohuz, in the Elqui Valley, the highest vineyards in Chile*

Elqui has less than 500 hectares of vineyards, so really tiny. There are many more hectares under white grapes, often Moscatel and Pedro Jiménez, for the production of Pisco, and even table grapes. There was a lot of anticipation for one small project, mostly due to the involvement of Marcelo Retamal, De Martino's winemaker and due to the fact that some of the best wines from the valley were produced with grapes purchased from this very same property. I'm talking about Viñedos de Alcohuz, a winery created in 2005 in the Elqui Valley. The winery is owned by the Flaño family represented by the painter Patricio Flaño, winemaker Marcelo Retamal, and a couple of friends - Fernando Vargas and the local Juan Luis Huerta and his wife Helia.



*The sun in Elqui is very strong given the altitude. Absence of humidity in the air makes it one of the best places on earth for stargazing.*

They have gone for low-tech, traditional updated solutions, adobe buildings supported by a wood structure and stone lagars sealed with ashes, but no expenses spared to get the best, Nombrot cement eggs (from the original French makers) and Austrian Stockinger oval wood foudres for example, and not rushing but taking a step by step approach. They have taken their time, and the first wines, from 2011 and 2014 are released in 2015. They are new, but already a reference for Elqui, with their vineyards located between 1,650 and 2,200 meters altitude, the highest vineyards in Chile. They are still experimenting, but from the different varieties they have planted, it looks like Garnacha, Syrah, Petit Syrah, Petit Verdot, Carignan and Malbec adapt better to the altitude and the decomposed granite soils.



*Traditional stone lagares used for fermentation at Viñedos de Alcohuz, the new high profile project in Elqui*

Their two cuvées are Syrah-based. I visited the vineyards, which are in a very wild place, a little extreme, with very clear skies, cold nights and warm days. The hills are sharp, somehow rustic, basically a deserted zone, as annual rainfall is around 90 liters (or millimeters, whatever you prefer), and the wines reflect the wilderness of the place. Unfortunately, in 2015 they had 30 centimeters of snow and temperatures dropped well below zero in mid-October and most of the vineyards suffered severe frost, so the 2016 harvest will surely be affected as they are waiting for a second sprouting hoping to still have some grapes at the end of the cycle. The dangers of mountain viticulture...



*Some of the vineyard pits were pretty permanent, as you can see here!*

Limarí has roughly 2,800 hectares of vineyards, although the drought of the last few years has forced many to abandon some of them, as there simply was no water to irrigate them all and they dried up. I visited a number of vineyards and zones within Limarí where limestone content in the soil varies wildly. Concha y Toro have a significant extension of vineyards there for their Maycas de Limarí project, as well as for other lines of wines, and I saw some impressive pits with winemaker Marcelo Papa.



*Talinay, a unique, limestone-rich vineyard in the Tabalí Costa appellation*

Tabalí's original vineyard is situated around the first modern winery built in the valley, a huge agricultural property where they also grow Pisco grapes. But it's probably their newer developments: the Talinay vineyard very close to the sea (12 kilometers), literally across the coastal range of mountains in a very windy Costa zone - where the limestone content is surprisingly high - and in their new development in the Río Hurtado commune, one of the five communes of the Limarí province, which is classified as Andes, as it's in the foothills of the Andes mountain range.



*Río Hurtado, a high altitude commune in Limarí where Tabalí has new plantings and produces the new Roca Madre wine*

In fact, the location of Tabalí's new Río Hurtado vineyard is just across the mountains from the Alcohuaz vineyards of Elqui, and the two zones have certain similarities. Here the vines are planted at some 1,500 meters' altitude. They planted 8.6 hectares with different varieties and the one that is working best so far is Malbec, from which they have produced a groundbreaking mountain Malbec called Roca Madre (bedrock) from extremely young vineyards on old, decomposed granite soils.



*The team from Viña Tabalí at the Talinay coastal vineyard where the native vegetation is large cacti*

We saw a number of pits to check the soils and roots, and I was thoroughly impressed by Tabalí's vineyard manager Héctor Rojas, by his knowledge and passion for viticulture and wine. I had the chance to visit some of their vineyards and I learned a lot with his explanations about the soils and the *terroirs*. He's a great asset.



*Héctor Rojas, vineyard manager from Viña Tabalí in Limarí*

## **No Need to Throw the Baby out With the Bathwater!**

All I have explained, all the new names I've mentioned - the País, the south, the improvement in Pinot and whatever - does not mean we have to forget about the established names and zones. Of course we love to talk about new projects like Alcohuz, new zones like Río Hurtado in Limarí, great discoveries like El Viejo Almacén de Sauzal or the recovery of regions like Cauquenes or Itata and old traditions like *Pipeño*. But working year after year in the same direction doing your best to improve is not to be ignored. On the contrary, it's possibly more important, especially when many of them are making better wines than ever. Especially

remarkable were the cases of Quebrada de Macul and Seña.



*Domus Aurea is a textbook Maipo Cabernet-based red with a distinct, highly recognizable label*

One name that has been around for a while but also seems to have been flying under the radar is Clos Quebrada de Macul, better known by their brand Domus Aurea and its distinctive label. They produce a classical Chilean Cabernet-based blend from the Macul zone in Alto Maipo, a zone that is slowly being swallowed by Santiago city, which in 2010 really excels and is one of the highest scorers this year. The once joint venture between Errázuriz and the Mondavis from California, and now an exclusive project of Errázuriz reaches unseen levels of finesse and elegance in the cool 2013 vintage. Errázuriz is seeing a general improvement in their wide range of wines, with an important focus on the cooler coastal parts of Aconcagua and the experimentation with Mediterranean varieties, plus the already mentioned Aconcagua Costa Chardonnay and Pinot Noir on slate soils.

De Martino is, without a doubt, one of the quality leaders of the country and in 2013 they have again produced an astounding collection of single vineyard bottlings showcasing the potential of many different zones of Chile. I especially loved their Vigno and had the chance to visit the source for it, a vineyard called La Aguada in the Sauzal zone of the Cauquenes. Later I called on their property in Itata in the village of Guarilhue (or Huarilhue), where I also visited other vineyards and growers, and witnessed some of the most amazing red granite soils I've seen in my life.



*La Aguada vineyard in Sauzal (Cauquenes), source for De Martino's Vigno was planted following the contour lines*

Something that might be overlooked is the fact that the team lead by Andrés Caballero in Santa Carolina are getting inspired by their old bottles (they have Cabernet Sauvignon and Semillon from the 1950s and 1960s) to create their newer wines. They are also working in Maule/Itata in the south but also in Limarí in the north. They are a good example of how quantity and quality are compatible.

At Concha y Toro, Marcelo Papa and Ignacio Recabarren are steadily working in the direction of less ripe and oaked wines, with some great results in Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmènère coming from almost pure experiments in some small lots that are later transposed to the larger volumes.

I should not forget names that already stood out last year: Bodegas RE, Undurraga, Gandolini... You can read about them in their individual profiles together with the tasting notes of their wines.



*I'm not sure this is the precision winemaking people talk about!*



## **But There's a Need for Better, Organic Viticulture!**

The increase of vineyards in Chile has been spectacular. We need to realize that planting is not restricted as it is in Europe, so people can plant as many vines as they like. The result is that the land under vine doubled between 1997 and 2014, from 63,000 hectares to some 137,000. Wine production has followed a similar path, from the 381 million liters of 1997 to the 1,233 million liters of 2014. Some simple math tells you that yields have grown almost 50%!

Jean-Pascal Lacaze, winemaker of Quebrada de Macul, who also has a small side project called Crazy Wines, told me that he lost a source of grapes because his grower hired an agronomist and from one year to the next, the yields were more than double and the quality... was not there anymore! So one of his wines was not produced for a couple of years, until he found another source.



*Limestone is rare in Chile*

I've heard from very competent people that they have produced wine with the fruit from a one-year-old vineyard! And two- and three-year-old vines certainly start producing wines.

New world plantations give very worrying statistics, someone told me that newly planted vines (not the dry farmed, head-pruned and well established vines from the southern regions) die at an average age of 17 years. Think of a kid that is put to work in a coal mine very early on: the kid will die very soon. That's what is happening with vineyards that have been abused through killing the life in the soils, adding nitrogen fertilizers, increasing yields, then the plants get stressed and die of exhaustion (bad irrigation, adding salts and potassium to the soils, nematodes through having eliminated the rest of animals and life in the soils...). In Casablanca for example, Chardonnay hardly reached the age of 15.

Of course, there are many doing good work and looking after their vineyards, but much is still to be improved. A good symptom is that I've also noticed an increasing interest for head-pruned vines, not only in the old, dry farmed vineyards of the south but also in recent plantings as many varieties in certain climate/soil/orography behave much better that way and the trellises do not always work.



*New head-pruned vineyards are starting to pop up in different regions*

## **Regraft for Your Life**



*I spent more time in pits in vineyards than in wineries!*

Last time I mentioned that I had never seen so many vineyard pits (I visited both Argentina and Chile in the same trip) and I also examined a few this time. I saw so much re-grafting this time that it really attracted my attention. In a young quality wine-producing country like Chile with complete freedom, it's normal to make mistakes with the grape varieties you plant. It takes a few years before a new vine starts yielding grapes, so uprooting and planting again makes you waste time - and time is money. But it's not only about that time, it's the time the roots need to go down and find the nutrients of the soil. It's the root system that is important and valuable. If you re-graft a 50-year-old vine, you still have the 50-year-old roots and that's the part of the plant that counts.



*I saw all sorts of re-grafting going on, old and young vineyards, head-pruned or trellised.  
Time for a change...*

So countless vineyards of País or old field blends are re-grafted, often to Mediterranean varieties, or short cycle varieties in warm climates are re-grafted to long cycle ones. The most extreme is what I saw at Pablo Morandé's field in Maule and used for one new wine from Bodegas RE. They have a new Mediterranean blend from Maule called 2015 Redoble, a wine produced as a field blend of mostly Garnacha and Cariñena with a pinch of Chardonnay and País.

The curiosity here is that the Garnacha and Cariñena were re-grafted on old País vines that had previously been re-grafted to Cinsault, and later to Chardonnay. But the unusual thing here (re-grafting is very common in Chile these days) is that each vine is re-grafted with one branch of Garnacha and another one of Cariñena, so one single plant grows both varieties. On top of that, if some of the old varieties also grow in a vine, they are left, picked and used in the blend, so there is maybe perhaps .5% Chardonnay, Cinsault and País here. It's a co-fermentation of all five grapes bottled unoaked to produce a fresh and easy to drink red, kept in 2,000- and 4,000-liter oak foudres. So up to four grape varieties in one same vine! Crazy, but that's RE...



*Extreme re-grafting at this RE vineyard: up to four varieties in one plant!*

All of these old vineyards are ungrafted and other than regrafting, the one thing that attracted my attention, as it's very different from the vineyards in Europe (except in the very few sandy/phylloxera-free zones), is the way to replace dead vines - as simply an arm from the vine is buried and a new plant grows. That's called a *mugrón*. Sometimes there are so many *mugrones* to replace dead plants in a given vineyard that it's impossible to talk about its age, as the original plants might have been planted decades ago, but they have also seen decades of replanting new vines with this straightforward and affordable method.



*The cheapest way to replant vines: bury an arm, and there you have it! It's called a mugrón, and it's possible because of the lack of phylloxera*

## **United We Stand, Divided We Fall**

Movi, the association of small wineries, has grown from the initial 12 founders in 2009 to the 28 members they have today. They are now focusing not only on the size but also on personal involvement of the owner, quality... and diversity. Beyond the higher profile associations like Vigno, Movi or Chanchos Deslenguados, I've seen more union between producers and even winemakers from larger wineries.

There are other groups and associations, more or less formal and created for different purposes, commercial, conspiracy or simply for the pleasure of meeting and sharing - El Cono del Silencio, Epicentro, some even unnamed, or the new Slow Vino, the brainchild of winemaker Stefano Gandolini.

We have to realize that the world of wine in Chile is fairly small, and everybody knows everybody!

Many winemakers are from the same generation and have studied together in one of the two main universities for viticulture and oenology in Santiago, with some friendly competition between the two - the Universidad Católica and the Universidad de Chile. It makes their wine world quite small and cozy and there's good camaraderie between winemakers beyond the commercial rivalry that might exist between winery owners or the commercial side of things. I'd say that in general there is a good

atmosphere of sharing and advancing together. Imagine, all your friends from university!

## 2013, A Great Opportunity

It's crazy to generalize about vintages for regions 1,000 kilometers apart. When in some regions I heard about a warm 2014 in others they told me 2014 was even colder than 2013. Furthermore, in a country that is suffering a deep transformation, the mindset and status of each individual winery in a given vintage might be more important than the growing cycle itself. Emerging producers make better wine each vintage, as the accumulated experience certainly carries more weight more than weather conditions, and the ones that have lost their way are going to miss it anyway. So the important stuff is explained in the individual tasting notes.

But I tasted more wines from 2013 than any other vintage this time around. 2013 was the coldest vintage in a very long time and while it was not an easy vintage, and it was quite generous in yields - a combination that presented no few challenges. But as I've seen in many other regions, this provided the conditions for the best and the worst. It's far from being a homogeneous vintage, but it gave the conscious producers an opportunity to deliver better wines than ever. Six out of my ten top scorers were from 2013. And no, the 2013s only represented 34% of the wines I tasted...

## Seafood Paradise (and More)

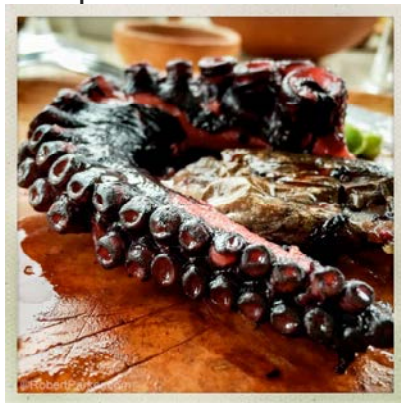
Every day gives you no less than three opportunities to eat. I try to moderate what I eat on the road, but two weeks in a foreign country provide lots of opportunities to try new stuff and after all, wine is part of gastronomy. I'm interested in the local culture and local food. Chile is a country with 6,000 kilometers of coast, so fresh fish and seafood are readily available. They still eat a lot of meat, though: pork and beef. I had *plateada*, a beef cut that some consider a national dish, delicious breads (*torta de rescoldo* baked in the hot ashes of a bonfire and warm and soft *pan amasado*) and plenty of *empanadas*. I love meat, but if great marine produce is available, I could eat that all the time.

At Las Brisas, a famous *picada*, an informal food joint in Loncomilla, Maule, we had (among other things) fried freshwater *Pejerrey* fish and frog's legs. In fact, they serve the whole frog save the head, but the body doesn't have much to eat. I was surprised at how white and clean the fish was, and I was told it came from the other side of the mountains, from Argentina where apparently it is farmed. Oh well! *Mote con huesillos* is a sweet drink of rehydrated dry peaches with wheat grains served cold in a tall glass, it's a dessert, a refreshing drink and a meal on its own!



*Giant mussel!*

The one thing I didn't get to try because it was the end of the season but was very intrigued about was the *camarón de campo*, a field crab similar to crayfish that is extracted directly from the damp vineyard soils with a pump. Apparently you have to purge them to get rid of the mud and muddy flavor and they make excellent tortillas. Anyway, yes, seafood and fish. I had succulent conger eel, humungous mussels, tender grilled octopus, a local variety of sea snail often confused with abalone called *locos* and plenty of sea urchins, which by the way are quite mild and not as iodine-laden as the ones from northern Spain.



*Delicious grilled octopus*

Two things I have never seen in Europe, *picorocos* and *piure*. *Picoroco* is a giant barnacle that is found in Chile and the south of Perú that lives inside a very hard shell that feels almost like a rock from where you can see its claws that look like a peak. They look quite weird, actually. The white meat is tender and delicious, and it's highly prized in Chile. I have seen photos of something very similar from the Portuguese Azores islands, but I have not had time to investigate... yet!



*The unusual looking picoroco, a delicious edible barnacle from Chile*

The one strong flavor not recommended for the faint of heart is that of *piure*, another edible local sea creature; its scientific name is *pyura chilensis*, so you can tell it's from Chile. Wikipedia (yes, you wouldn't think I knew the scientific name, right?) aptly describes it as resembling "a mass of organs inside a rock." They are bright red and if *picoroco* look weird, this can be scary if you see it in the actual rock. They'd normally give it to you clean, cooked or raw in a kind of *ceviche* with plenty of cilantro. Its pungent flavor is the essence of the sea full of iodine and umami, like a sea urchin on steroids, a bit raw and extreme, intense, not really easy for most wines...



*Piure, one of the stronger flavored seafood*

Oh, dear, I'm getting hungry now after all of this talk about nice food! Apparently when winemakers from Mendoza are fed up with their local *asados*, they cross the Andes and come to Chile for a feast of fish and seafood. I cannot blame them. I tell you, and I also refer to the wines here, this is not the industrial and boring Chile you might have had in mind. Think outside the box.



—Luis Gutiérrez