



Cesar Morales

TOP OF the crops

Just 10 companies are responsible for making the majority of bottled wines exported from Chile. *Amanda Barnes* profiles the winemakers behind those firms

WHAT THESE 10 men are making is most likely what you are drinking. They command two-thirds of bottled Chilean wine exported in the past year. Their daily decisions in the vineyard and winery affect the wine that eventually reaches your glass, and for that alone they are some of the most powerful and influential winemakers in Chile.

The list is compiled with Wines of Chile statistics on the quantity of bottled wine

exported from Chile between June 2015 and May 2016.

We opted not to include bulk wine exports, as this is a blind spot for the consumer, but it is noteworthy that bulk wine still plays an important role in Chile's wine exports.

There are, of course, some familiar brands missing from the list. Perhaps most notably, Montes and Errazuriz do not make it to the top 10 in volume,

although in export value they figure seventh and eighth respectively.

There is also a clear lack of female winemakers on the list. If we took data from 2014, Viña Carta Vieja's winemaker, Rosario Dominguez Gil, would have made ninth position but a drop in exportation this year slides her into 11th position. So for now it is an all-male line up. Without further ado, we bring you the top 10.

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10. VIÑEDOS EMILIANA,
CESAR MORALES:
10.3 MILLION BOTTLES

Emiliana may only be tenth on this list, but it is the world’s biggest biodynamic and organic producer. Heading this green winery is the Chilean Cesar Morales.

He fell for winemaking through the vineyard and, despite the large volume he is pushing, he still feels in touch with nature: “Being a winemaker puts you at the centre of a tremendous process of transformation that starts in the most intimate parts of our earth. Being their companion in the vineyards is key in order to mould their destination.”

Morales, accompanied in the vineyard by the consultant winemaker Alvaro Espinoza, Chile’s biodynamic wine guru, is a firm believer in biodynamics. But that doesn’t mean he leaves all the hard work to chamomile flowers and bull horns. To manage an estate of this size, you have to have your smarts in the winery as well: “You have to be very organised and methodic, it is impossible to make good wines if you don’t have a strategy. If you have the logistics organised, you can submerge yourself in the world of details and do some of the finest winemaking in the world.”

With the second highest price per case on our list, it would seem many consumers agree with him.

9. VIÑA REQUINGUA,
BENOIT FITTE:
10.9 MILLION BOTTLES

The Curico winery saw a boost in exports this year, pushing it into ninth position. The winemaker behind the bottle is a Frenchman, Benoit Fitte, who followed



Chile’s 10 biggest shippers: Total bottled wine
(June 2015 to May 2016)

Source: Wines of Chile

Winery	Cases of 9 L	Avg. price per case of 9 litres. USD
1 VINA CONCHA Y TORO S.A.	12,970,015	25.68
2 VSPT WINE GROUP.	7,037,897	23.78
3 VINA CONO SUR LTDA.	2,822,102	26.39
4 VINA LUIS FELIPE EDWARDS	2,511,261	24.03
5 VINA SANTA CAROLINA S.A.	1,933,920	22.76
6 VINA SANTA RITA S.A.	1,852,345	34.27
7 VINA MAIPO LTDA.	1,402,366	20.04
8 VINICOLA DE AGUIRRE S.A.	958,783	21.42
9 VINA REQUINGUA	912,985	26.65
10 VINEDOS EMILIANA S.A.	860,226	31.12

the footsteps of his Armagnac-producing grandfather into winemaking. After working in many châteaux around France Fitte came to Chile, and is now in charge of more than 10 million bottles annually.

The opportunity to work in diverse regions is almost unthinkable in France, and that was Chile’s main draw for Fitte: “I enjoy working with the 25 different varieties we have in our vineyard, and also all the very different sectors in the vineyards that come from four valleys and multiple terrains,” he says.

However, the scale also brings certain demands: “The greatest challenge is that the millions of consumers who drink our wines around the world continue opening our bottles, which means that we have to maintain our style in each one of the wines we produce.

“Maintaining total control of the operation is our leitmotiv.”

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8. VINICOLA DE AGUIRRE, CLAUDIO GONÇALVES: 11.5 MILLION BOTTLES

Vinicola de Aguirre (VDA) takes sixth position in the top ten, though the company itself may not be a household name. However, VDA is home to multiple export brands – winemaker Claudio Gonçalves is in charge of making a family of wine series that includes Sol de Chile, Libertas, Alma de Chile, Viento Sur, Longitude, Promesa, Ave Maria, Camino de Chile, Paraíso and Santa Loreto.

Although de Aguirre produces more than 11 million bottles of wine, the

company is relatively new to Chile's wine scene having only made its first crush in 2000 and its first export in 2005. Since then, it has been the fastest growing winery in Chile and has become a powerhouse in Maule province. Has the fast growth been demanding? "The main demand is to have passion for work well done," Gonçalves says. "The challenges constantly improve and contribute to the development of an integrated organisation and team. The best thing about working at VDA is the human relationship. You are not only working with grapes, but with a community."

7. VIÑA MAIPO, MAX WEINLAUB: 16.8 MILLION BOTTLES

Moving up to position number seven, we see a jump in production numbers at Viña Maipo. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the winery falls under the umbrella holding of Concha y Toro, which has the largest number of planted vineyards in the world. Making just over 16.8 million bottles for this Maipo-based wine brand is the Chilean winemaker Max Weinlaub.

Born on the rural island of Chiloe, where milk and beef production are king, Weinlaub studied agronomy at university on the mainland. Although he had never tried wine before, it soon caught his eye: "After the second class I fell in love with this fascinating world switching from milk to wine, and changing cows for vines," he enthuses.

His wine career propelled him from his small island village to large wineries in California and Chile. "I've been working in big cellars since the beginning of my career. This is a natural environment for

'The winemaker is like the director of a great orchestra. Think micro, act macro!'

me. I'm comfortable working between big tanks or with huge amounts of barrels." Although the numbers are high, he believes size doesn't matter when it comes to craftsmanship, only the focus: "The winemaker is like the director of a great orchestra. Think micro, act macro!"

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6. SANTA RITA, ANDRÉS ILABACA: 22.2 MILLION BOTTLES

Moving into sixth place is Santa Rita with another jump in production numbers, as well as a leap in price.

Santa Rita commands the highest average price per case on the list, at \$34.27, which winemaker Andrés Ilabaca puts down to consistency, despite the dramatic changes in the industry: "There

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has been a great evolution in Chile, which has produced new challenges. Chile is not the same country as 30 years ago, the working reality has changed, technology has changed and you need to be on top of

that; maintaining quality over time."

Ilabaca has had a front row seat for these changes since Chile opened up to the world in the 1980s. He has experienced the influx of foreign knowledge and technology into Chile, and has also seen the influence of the export markets on the industry over time: "I have lived through the experience of 'reduction', of 'micro-oxygenation', of looking for fresher wines, and of looking for wines with more ageing potential. It has been part of the search for the 'terroir' in our wines."

5. SANTA CAROLINA, ANDRÉS CABALLERO: 23.2 MILLION BOTTLES

Santa Carolina winemaker Andrés Caballero cut his teeth at his uncle Aurelio Montes' winery, as well as Viña Casablanca, before coming to Santa Carolina, a much bigger endeavour that brought both challenges and advantages. "It is

a very challenging job, where you have to be attentive to all the important markets of the world," he says. "Working at Santa Carolina has an advantage in that you have a vision of the vineyards, regions,

investigations, development of new projects and investments. The speed of learning is unique."

What does Andrés see as the biggest challenge of working in big volumes? "Your decisions have a big scale effect, so beginner's errors are not allowed. You have to be very careful about decisions and planning." While consistency is important, he says, he also believes there is still room for experimentation and small-scale projects. "You could say premium wines and varietal wines are different countries. There is cooperation, but they have very clear boundaries. This allows us to take on large projects and small ones without losing focus." In recent years Santa Carolina's experimental wines have taken the firm to new plantations in the Tamarugal desert; to century-old vines in Itata; and to researching Chile's historical winemaking in the 1950s and 1960s, recreated in its super-premium wine, Luis Pereira.

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Nicolas Bizzarri

4. VIÑA LUIS FELIPE EDWARDS, NICOLAS BIZZARRI: 30.1 MILLION BOTTLES

Just outside the top three, and stepping up the game to more than 30 million bottles, comes the family winery Luis Felipe Edwards (LFE). Head winemaker Nicolas Bizzarri was the first Chilean winemaker to graduate in Australia, but his career has always been focused in Chile, where he believes you can still make a personal wine on a bigger scale.

"I don't agree that to be a personal wine

know it and have passion behind it, not because you make a small volume."

What large volumes do bring though, in his opinion, is more responsibility to the consumer: "When you are responsible for millions of bottles sold in 100 countries and the expectation is that all of them must arrive perfect to be liked by everyone, it is a big challenge and quite stressful. I must be very aware of consumer feedback." It is this feedback that drives him: "One of the most rewarding things is receiving compliments from consumers. I feel glad to contribute to the happiness of our consumers. Wine is joy."

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it must be small volume. I personally choose and select the grapes that we use for our wines," he says. "I follow them step by step.

"A personal wine is when you really

3. CONO SUR, ADOLFO HURTADO: 33.9 MILLION BOTTLES

Cono Sur, which just steps into third place in volume on our list, is not only South America's biggest Pinot Noir producer, but also a global leader.

The variety may be notoriously fickle and difficult to master, but head winemaker Adolfo Hurtado says it is, in fact, his favourite variety to work with, even in larger volumes. "We enjoy working with Pinot Noir the most – it is our emblematic variety. It is also the hardest, but it is a beautiful challenge," he reveals.



Adolfo Hurtado

Cono Sur, which is part of the Concha y Toro holding, makes more than Pinot today though, with 10 varieties on its books. Cono Sur was not always such a big producer, and Hurtado has been there since the very beginning, more than 19 years ago. "What I most enjoy is that the size hasn't always been the same. In fact it was very much to the contrary," he says. "I have had the chance to work with Cono Sur since the beginning and, together with an extraordinary team, transform the agriculture, winemaking, commercial and marketing areas into a great winery and the brand it is today."

As general manager and head winemaker, Hurtado has his plate full. "The double responsibility does, of course, mean a great demand on my time, but all the decisions are taken based on the quality of the wine, and this is fundamental to the success of the company. You must never forget the nobility of the product and the importance of its quality."

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2. VIÑA SAN PEDRO, MARCO PUYO: 84.4 MILLION BOTTLES

The head winemaker of Viña San Pedro (VSPT), Marco Puyo, finds himself at second place in our top ten, producing wines both under VSPT's well known commercial brands, such as Tarapaca, Viña Leyda and 1865, and its icon lines, including Altaïr and Cabo de Hornos. "The challenge is to work in different activities, which are all important for the winery," he says. "To produce good wines of different levels, which maintain a defined style."

Making wines all over the country is undoubtedly a challenge, so what works best at a large volume? Puyo says he finds Syrah the simplest, "it is difficult to make a bad wine with this variety"; Cabernet Sauvignon the most enjoyable, "we have a big diversity of vineyards and origins, giving us all the elements to make a good wine"; and Sauvignon Blanc the trickiest, "when large volumes are handled, they must be moved several times inside the winery before bottling. It's very sensitive to oxidation, which makes us redouble our efforts."

Puyo and his winemaking team are doubling their efforts, for they handle more than double the volume of wine of the other wineries on our list so far. What is his advice for new winemakers moving

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Marco Puyo

into the bigger arena? "Go forward calmly in your career, don't rush more than necessary – everybody makes mistakes and must learn from them, those are the moments of greatest growth.

"But above all, love wine and let wine be part of your life, always taking care to maintain a balance in life – family is key to maintaining your head in balance."

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Marcelo Papa

1. CONCHA Y TORO, MARCELO PAPA: 155.6 MILLION BOTTLES

It is no surprise that Concha y Toro tops the list of leading Chilean wine exporters, with figures 80% larger than the number two, and four and a half times the size of the number three. Just under five bottles of Concha y Toro wine are being uncorked somewhere in the world every second, giving it not only the most swagger in Chile but making it one of the

world's most accessible wine brands.

There are, of course, many winemakers behind Concha y Toro, but the figurehead is the Chilean winemaker Marcelo Papa, who manages the household names Casillero del Diablo and Marqués de Casa Concha, among others.

Papa is perhaps the most powerful winemaker in Chile today. However, he did not enter winemaking with such high ambitions: "When I started university, the wineries were at the end of a crisis and

expectations weren't high – there were few students on the winemaking course."

The industry might have been struggling but Papa's star was on the rise. He worked for Jackson Family Wines in California before moving back to South America and beginning his career path at Concha y Toro. Since then, he says, "I have a unique and marvellous opportunity to make wine from many different origins, as well as working with many winemakers. You learn a lot at a very fast pace."

A fast rhythm with large volumes does, of course, bring its challenges: "The level

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of responsibility is very high, every day you are bottling thousands of litres and one needs to be responsible for the expectations of the consumer."

With millions of consumers, can you still make a personal wine? "Of course, and more than one. When you find vineyards of great character, you do everything possible to reflect their origin."

With a portfolio of hundreds of labels, it is clear Papa is trying his best to reflect the dizzying diversity of Chile. *db*