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## **Chilean Wine History and Style**

**By Tynan Szvetez**

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The Buddhists say that life is suffering. The capitalists say that life is a struggle. The communists say that life is a team-effort. But the Chileans say that life is beautiful. Why? Because sometimes you are just born with a full deck of cards. Chile is perhaps the only wine making country on Earth that seems to have everything exactly where it wants it.

Spanning a formidable length of 2,700 miles, Chile is the poster child for geographic isolation. With the frigid Antarctic ice off its southern border, a desert off the northern one, and its heart squeezed between the Pacific Ocean on the western border and the epic Andes on the eastern border, it is quite literally a cradle for the choicest wine growing conditions on the planet.

In fact, the isolation has fostered a wine growing environment in which little or no pesticides need be used to ward off grape eating predators, an achievement that speaks most notably when Chile can claim along with Argentina to be one of only two countries in the world to not have been afflicted by the lethal phylloxera pest (this insect destroyed European vineyards in the late 19th century and reeked havoc on California vineyards in the 20th).

To add insult to injury, the grape-growing environment is so favorable, and the land and labor so cheap, that Chilean wine has developed a reputation for having the best value to price ratios on the market.

While Chile's wine history runs deep - the first vines were allegedly planted by Cortez in the early 16th century - it ran up against the same wall that colonized wine regions of high potential did like Argentina and South Africa. In all cases, poor political climate combined with restrictive taxes and local populations that favored cheap, unexceptional wines to force wine makers to keep their creativity relatively tame. And like these countries, Chile was ready to rise to the challenge when conditions finally shifted - in its case during the late 1980's.

## Chilean Wine History and Style

In perhaps the most precocious growth spurt in wine making history, Chile went from wines that were nothing of note to wines that were first class in less than ten years. Vineyard establishments in Spain, Italy and the United States were ready to invest heavily when conditions were ripe, resulting in an amazing number of Chilean vineyards having the most up-to-date facilities around. As if the perfect wine growing climate wasn't enough.

These investments in the best equipment as well as select French and American oak barrels helped give a boost to wine makers that were already chopping at the bit to take advantage of the wine growing climate and make some truly notable wines.

Some places are just born to be great, but the beauty of it in this case is that the rest of us can enjoy it at a great value!

Chile is perhaps best known for its world-class interpretation of the Cabernet Sauvignon grape. A few

bold souls have even claimed that there are certain Chilean vineyards that are more Bordeaux than Bordeaux!

A large part of Chile's fascination with the big four grapes - Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot and Sauvignon Blanc - revolves around its targeting of the American market. During the late 80's and early 90's when the Chilean wine boom really came into full swing, the American market was devouring wines that were not only made from recognizable grapes like Cabernet and Chardonnay, but also were sold at a reasonable price. To this day, the United States remains the premier importer of Chilean wine.

One of the more important ingredients in the recent Chilean wine exploration was that while major vineyards upgraded their facilities, smaller, family owned vineyards decided to take the leap and market their own brands. The result was that more definitively unique wines emerged from the area, though at higher prices. This suggests that while a reasonably priced \$10 Chilean Chardonnay will be pretty good, a more expensive \$40 or \$50 bottle will be great.

Anyone familiar with Chilean wines will not be surprised to hear the reference to Carmenere, a medium bodied grape that is the source of many smoky and bold reds. In fact, a Chilean Merlot might actually be crafted from the Carmenere grape. As more mature Chilean vineyards are able to distinguish between vines using DNA testing, consistency in labeling practices will become more dependable.

There is also an important labeling note to keep heed of regarding Chilean wines. Because of Chile's proximity to the Andes, there is often too much water introduced into the irrigation process (note from discussions in the Wine Growing categories of

that, in general, the less water a

vine receives the higher quality the final harvest will be). As a result, some higher quality vineyards have shifted to a drip irrigation system that controls the amount of water introduced throughout the growing season. If you note anything related to drip irrigation on the back of a bottle of Chilean wine,

there is a good bet it will be a keeper.

Tynan Szvetecz is an editor for

, an international wine directory that is

helping explore the spirit of wine for a new generation.

This article can also be viewed at

## **An Introduction To Wine Classifications**

**By Gabriel Adams**

Wine. Wine is probably the most widespread and historically significant beverage other than water, and has been for thousands of years. Wine is the drink of kings, just as it is the beverage of choice for the wino on third street. Wine has played a major role in the rise and fall of countless individuals, nations and even civilizations.

As interesting as the history of wine is, though, this article is about the classification of different wines. Wine is normally classified by vinification method, by taste, by vintage, by wine style, and / or by quality.

Vinification refers to how the wine is made. Examples of classifications by vinification method include still, sparkling, rose, or blush. For example, champagne is a sparkling wine. Sparling wines are wines which contain carbon dioxide, which may either be a by product of the fermentation, or may be added.

Wines are also classified by taste. Wines may be classified as dry (meaning not sweet), fruity, or sweet, for example. Or wines may be classified according to specific flavors.

Vintage is another method of classifying wines. Vintage is just another name for the year the grapes for the wine were harvested. Vintage wines are often made of the highest quality grapes, and normally command a higher price than non-vintage (wine from mixed years) wines.

Wine may also be classified by any one of dozens of wine styles. For example, Bordeaux is a style of red wine from France. Kerner is a style of white wine from Italy.

Wine may range in price from a few dollars a bottle to hundreds or thousands of dollars a bottle. Many premium wines cost hundreds of dollars a bottle. Part of the reason for the high price is that many premium wines are aged for years or even decades. Many bottles are lost during the aging process, so the end price goes up.

For more info on wine, visit

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