

CHILE

- A strip of land 4,300 km long and 200 km wide.
- A country defined to the north by the hot, dry Atacama desert, to the south by ice and snow, to the east by the Andes Mountains and to the west by the Pacific Ocean.
- Average annual growth in excess of 6%.
- First vines introduced in the mid-16th century by Catholic missionaries who had accompanied the Spanish conquistadores.
- 1840 : Chile becomes the biggest wine producer in Latin America.
- The vines adapt particularly well, paving the way for production of the first Chilean fine wines.
- 1865 : Phylloxera invades Europe.
- 1986 : Major high-prestige investors take an interest in Chile, generating a real technology transfer.
- Modern methods are introduced : stainless steel vats, low temperature fermentation, new oak casks, etc.
- Top Chilean estates direct their production towards fine wines for export.

The 3 wine-growing regions are divided into sub-regions and zones.

REGION	SUB-REGION	ZONE	
Aconcagua	Aconcagua Valley		
	Casablanca Valley		
Central Valley	Maipo Valley	Cachapoal Valley Colchagua Valley	
	Rapel Valley		
	Curico Valley		Teno Valley Lontue Valley
	Maule Valley		Claro Valley Loncomilla Valley Tutuvén Valley
Southern Region	Itata Valley		
	Bio-Bio Valley		

IDEAL SOIL AND CLIMATE

- Climate subject to a dual influence:

During the day, sea breezes are warmed by contact with the coastal range and penetrate the valleys; at night, cold air blows down from the Andes mountains.

- Hot days and cool nights help to ensure optimum maturity.

THE HEALTHIEST VINES IN THE WORLD

- The only country in the world unaffected by phylloxera, protected by the natural barriers of desert to the north, the Andes to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west.
- Little need for treatments (one or two against oidium during the year).
- Total absence of mildew.
- Vines grown without rootstock or grafting.

Geography and Climate

The two greatest influences on Chile's climate are the huge mass of the Pacific Ocean to the west and, most importantly, the spectacular mountain range of the Andes which runs as a boundary down the entire eastern edge of the country.

These two monumental forces serve to cool the air. In the Andes case, they also provide a supply of irrigating water which drains down off the mountain and is channeled to the sea via an ancient system of canals built by the Incas.

There has been much investment in Chile's wine industry over the past decade or so, and a massive swing towards cleaner, new technology winemaking. Traditionally, ancient wooden vats were used for vinification, made from a local wood called **raulí**, a species of evergreen birch. In general, standards of winemaking and hygiene were in decline through the middle of the last century, but the old vats are now relegated to the poorest wines for cheap local consumption. They have been replaced by high-tech temples full of shining stainless steel and new French or American oak.

Chile has attracted many foreign collaborators and investors including Robert Mondavi of California (Caliterra), The Rothschilds of Bordeaux's Château Lafite (Los Vacos) and Miguel Torres of Spain (Torres). These estates have either set up operations in Chile, or have formed partnerships with the best Chilean houses.

Demarcated Wine Regions

Traditionally wineries sourced their grapes from all over the country, but in recent years Chile has begun to demarcate its vineyard regions into a system of controlled viticultural areas. Thus, the labelling of modern Chilean wines will carry the name of one of these areas. Basically, these named areas are the valleys formed by rivers flowing east from the Andes to the sea Aconcagua. This northerly, hot and generally arid region is best suited to red wine production. Some quality Cabernet Sauvignon is produced. **The Errázuriz estate** is the area's only really significant name, where Californian wine maker **Ed Flaherty** is turning out very serious Chardonnays from hillside vineyards, as well as excellent reds.

Casablanca

One of the new quality regions that has really put Chile on the global map, Casablanca is a relatively cool and largely coastal region producing classy Chardonnay and world class Sauvignon Blanc. It is also being planted with Pinot Noir in an attempt to exploit its cool climate conditions with one of the *sexiest* grape varieties amongst knowledgeable wine consumers. Some of Chile's top wines come from this small region, including the *Cuvée Alexandre* Chardonnay of **Casa Lapostolle** and the Casablanca Chardonnays made by Ignacio **Recabarren**, one of the leading lights of the Chilean industry.

Maipó

The Maipó region, just south of Santiago, is one of Chile's best-known and longest established quality wine regions. Here also are some of the biggest names of the Chilean industry such as the giant **Concha y Toro** and **Santa Rita**. Cabernet Sauvignon is the mainstay of the region and quality is high. A fine example is **Antiguas Reservas** from **Cousiño Macul**, a long-lived and classy wine at a bargain price.

Rapel

The largest of the fine wine areas, the Rapel valley features a range of climatic conditions and soil types which makes generalising about the wines difficult. **Merlot** is one of the stars here, from producers like **Carmen** (whose base is in **Maipó**) and **Mont Gras**. You will see the name **Colchagua** valley on Rapel bottlings, a small high-quality sub-region towards the coast. **Cono Sur** is one of the most interesting producers in the region, constantly experimenting with Pinot Noir, Viognier and Gewürztraminer amongst others, to very good and moderately priced effect.

Curicó and Maule

The Maule Valley is separated in the northern Curicó region, and the southerly Maule. A lot of pretty ordinary wine is produced in this region, but then there are numerous exceptions where the best soils and cooler microclimates lend class in wines from producers like **San Pedro, Miguel Torres, Domaine Oriental and Montes**. Another sub-regional name you will see on labels is **Lontué, Valdevieso** being one of its biggest and best producers.

Bío Bío

This large region (not shown on map) lies south of the Maule Valley. Though larger given over to inexpensive 'jug' wines, there is investment in the area. With its cooler southern climate it is an area to watch over coming years.

Premium Wines

It was inevitable given the quality of Chile's raw materials and the growing confidence brought about through investment in the wine industry that they would not be content with supplying a mass market of budget to medium-priced wines. Perhaps with one eye on the drive towards premium pricing in Australia, perhaps with a view of the crazy prices obtained by California's cult wines, several houses have begun to release super-Chilean Bordeaux blends.

Valdevieso was one of the earliest, its **Caballo Loco** being launched on the market in 1997 as a deliberate move to create the first Chilean superstar wine. Many others are now on the market, several breaching the £20/\$35 barrier, taking them firmly into the arena of prestige wines. Amongst the best examples are reckoned to be **Cousiño Macul's Finis Terrae, Montes "M", Errázuriz's Seña** and, with a brand new state of the art winery, **Almaviva**, a collaboration between **Mouton-Rothschild** and **Concha y Toro**.

