

Agustinos, Gran Reserva Pinot Noir 2005 Bio Bio

7 Aug 2007 by JR

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Nothing will replace fine red burgundy but we Pinot Noir lovers are certainly increasingly spoiled by offerings from all over the world. Well at least from some of the cooler corners of the wine world.

In Chile this has tended to mean the heavily Pacific-influenced Casablanca Valley inland from Valparaiso or the San Antonio Valley and its Leyda enclave but now we are seeing an increasing number of interesting Pinots from Chile's second southernmost wine region Bio Bio. Only Malleco can boast vineyards further south in Chile than Bio Bio and has so far been known for precisely one wine, Viña Aquitania's award-winning SoldeSol Chardonnay. Growers in Bio Bio have to put up with 1,200 mm of rain a year and the race is between grape ripening and the rain's arrival, typically in April - although summer winds help keep the vines healthy and not too vigorous. See Peter Richards' excellent *The Wines of Chile* (2006) in the Classic Wine Library series for more detail.

One wine producer that has taken Bio Bio particularly seriously is the Corpora group, which includes Gracia, Porta, Veranda and Agustinos. Beginning as long ago as 1993, they have invested heavily in top quality new vineyards down there and more recently bought the Canata winery (now called Quinel) in order to move wine production closer to the vines. They have called in Pascal Marchand (ex Comte Armand and Dom de la Vougeraie) and are now planting dry-farmed vineyards and one that will be biodynamic - all this helped by the fact that they have a substantial vine nursery down there and have done considerable work on matching clone and site. Corpora now have 680 ha of vineyards in Bio Bio, which is on roughly the same latitude as Marlborough in New Zealand and Argentine Patagonia. [Bio Bio is actually closer in latitude to Hawke's Bay than to Marlborough. Thanks to Daniela Neumann, a Chilean winemaker working in Marlborough, for pointing this out.]

I had already noticed that the **Porta Reserva Pinot Noir Bio Bio** sold by the likes of Tesco and Thresher at £6.49 is much better than one would expect at the price but my attention has been grabbed more recently by an altogether more serious wine from the same group, though with a different winemaker, as all these labels have, **Agustinos, Gran Reserva Pinot Noir 2005 Bio Bio**. Pale ruby with quite a pale rim, this wine has a really interesting, vivaciously burgundian build. Although it's 13.7% alcohol it's in no way heavy or too sweet. It dances lightly on the palate, has some intriguing coffee bean notes (not as simple as barrel toast) and also lovely acidity and texture. Very enveloping and quite velvety with a certain richness, it's still refreshing with some acidity and light tannins. It's already fully readable and I would not keep it much beyond the end of this year, but it's a very attractive for early drinking. Made in open-topped fermenters *à la Bourgogne*, it was matured in French oak, of which there is a slight whiff. This is undoubtedly a bargain and may well be benefiting from young vine concentration of flavour at this early stage.

*It's widely available in the US, from \$9.99 according to wine searcher - although I do wonder whether that Reserva specified in the title is the same as this Gran Reserva wine at that price. (**9 Aug** - Purple pager Max Eyzaguirre of Chile assures me that there is no Reserva Pinot so presumably this \$9.99 wine is indeed the Gran Reserva.)

Wine searcher also finds it chez several retailers in the UK from £8 and in Korea. According to UK importers Hallgarten, it retails for around £10.50 from the following UK retailers:

Tim Morrison Fine Wines, KA19 8AH, Scotland, 01655883531
Kingsgate Wines, SO23 9PD, Hampshire, 01962854670
Nidderdale Fine Wines, HG3 5AW, Yorkshire, 01423 711703
Bacchus Cavovin, GU28 9JD, West Sussex, 01403820976
Greatworth Ltd, IG11 0UY, Essex, 01375853111
Good Wine Shop, TW7 7BZ, Middlesex, 02088927756
Cellar Door Wines, AL1 1JB, Herts, 01727854488
Lodge Wines, BH20 7EF, Dorset, 07730983500

According to Agustinos, the following international importers have taken this wine:

Hallgarten, UK
Wine Company, Brazil [curious name?]
Apollo, USA
Allen Wine, Taiwan
Partner Center, Poland
Skovgard, Denmark
SAQ, Canada
Leon Collaris, Holland
Livewell, Belgium
Gelsva, Lithuania

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