

Chilean Sauvignon Blanc

28 Mar 2006 by JR

I may be wrong but I get the impression that Chilean wine has a much better image in the UK than in the US where Argentina seems to be setting the pace. But in Britain for the last two or three years Chile has kept surprising us with the range and quality of what it has to offer over the big three Bordeaux grapes Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Carmenère.

I have long cited Chile as the source of probably the best- value inexpensive Pinot Noir in the world such as the £4.99 bottlings of the likes of Cono Sur and Morandé. But the single most exciting current development in Chile is the range of fine white wines now emerging. I have seriously enjoyed various intensely varietal yet refreshing Gewurztraminers, including a simple one when taking two of my children out to a local noodle bar but notably **Cono Sur Visión, El Marco Vineyard Gewurztraminer 2005 Casablanca Valley** which is currently £7.99 at Majestic but will be £5.99 from May.

We are also seeing a heartening range of well- balanced, interesting blends of various white grapes, particularly Rhône grapes – not just Viognier but also Marsanne. **Novas Chardonnay Marsanne Viognier 2005 Casablanca Valley** is a particularly opulent, full- bodied organic wine from Alvaro Espinoza and currently £8.95 from organic specialists Vintage Roots. Wallow in it, but don't keep it.

There are Chardonnays aplenty of course, but perhaps most distinctive and useful is Chile's wide range of fine, increasingly subtle Sauvignon Blancs. For ages Casablanca Valley was the only place to find examples with sufficient natural acidity but now exciting examples are emerging from San Antonia/ Leyda and Elqui. Julia was particularly impressed by these four examples on her trip to Chile last December:

Matetic, EQ Sauvignon Blanc 2005 San Antonio Valley (apparently available in US \$14.99 but not yet in UK)

Montes Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Leyda

Errazuriz, Arboleda Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Leyda

Errazuriz, La Escultura Estate Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Casablanca Valley

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I can second her enthusiasm for **Montes Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Leyda** (I haven't tasted the other three) which strikes me, far from a committed Sauvignon Blanc fan, as a deeply serious wine that is both lively and richly flavoured. In the UK this is exclusive to Majestic which is currently selling it at £7.99 but again this will come down to a stunning £5.99 from May. I urge fans of Marlborough Sauvignon to give this a try. In the US it is much more expensive.

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Another very fine example, pungently Marlborough- like, although it was grown about 1,500 metres higher above sea level than any New Zealand Sauvignon, is **Alta Tierra Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Elqui Valley** currently offered by Laithwaites mail order at £7.65 a bottle. This is the same producer, Viña Falernia, as produced an earlier, red [wine of the week](#) up in this new, northernmost wine region of Chile. Grassy and powerful, this wine benefits from particularly cool nights at this altitude.

Two very respectable, both mineral- scented Chilean Sauvignons at £4.99 in the UK are **Marks & Spencer Casablanca Sauvignon Blanc 2005**

Casablanca Valley from Casablanca pioneer Pablo Morandé and **Misiones de Rengo Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Maule** which Morrisons are selling at £4.99. (I see it costs \$2 in Chile)

Perhaps 2005 was a particularly good year for Chilean whites. Or perhaps Chileans are just getting better and better at growing and making them.

Incidentally, I had a particularly arresting Sauvignon Blanc at about £10 from Patagonia in the deep south of Argentina recently, **Familia Schroeder, Saurus Sauvignon Blanc 2005 Patagonia**. It was oaked, perhaps very slightly too much so for my taste so that there was a certain oiliness about the wine, but there was no doubting the fine, ramrod- backed quality of the fruit – and the wine was bone dry, notably drier than most southern hemisphere Sauvignons. This is definitely a Sauvignon terroir to watch.

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