

Castillo de Molina, Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2009 Elqui Valley

22 Sep 2009 by Jancis Robinson

From £5.99/£7.99

[Find Casa Marin, Cipreses Sauvignon Blanc 2008](#)

I went to the annual [Chilean tasting in London](#) a couple of weeks ago and was struck forcefully by how fast the wine map is changing in the long, thin country. New wine regions seem to be sprouting up almost monthly. Elqui Valley (pictured) is not brand new, of course. I chose a Carmenère as [wine of the week](#) from there four years ago. A white table wine made from Pedro Ximenez grown there has, unexpectedly, become a staple at the UK supermarket Marks & Spencer.

But, showing the flexibility of Chile's larger wine producers, who now seem to be sourcing grapes the length and (virtually inconsiderable) breadth of the country, **Castillo de Molina, Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2009 Elqui Valley** is made by the vast San Pedro group whose base winery (featured in [Jancis Robinson's Wine Course](#)) is in Molina just south of Curicó hundreds of miles south of the Elqui Valley. For years Casablanca was Chile's cool, new source of Sauvignon Blanc grapes but now it has been joined by Leyda/San Antonio, which is even more coastal, and by the ocean-cooled semi-desert that is Elqui Valley even further north, 300 miles north of the capital Santiago.

This very young Sauvignon Blanc is presumably from very young vines but it has admirable intensity and pungency and real tension and, yes, even a hint of minerality on the palate. (There is quite a bit of limestone in western Elqui.) Just what you might expect from Marlborough at around £10. As far as I can see, it is currently available only at Majestic in the UK, where the regular price per bottle is £7.99 but until the end of the year this comes down to an excellent £5.99 if two bottles are bought. This wine is made from hand-picked grapes grown 20 km inland at a yield of around 10 tonnes/ha (about 70 hl/ha). The alcohol is just over 13%.

Both the 2008 and 2007 vintages managed to win a trophy at the Decanter World Wine Awards but Majestic have inconveniently now moved on to the 2009. I have tasted both 2008 and 2009 recently. The 2008 is a little more generous on the nose and slightly sweeter on the palate but I suspect the 2009 may develop into a more interesting, finer wine. It's certainly more refined and restrained. I would be happy to drink it any time over the next 12 months at least, and am glad to see Chile giving New Zealand a run for its Sauvignon Blanc money, especially when so many of the cheaper 2008 and 2009 Marlborough Sauvignons lack focus. Competition is A Good Thing for us consumers.

The Vina San Pedro Tarapacá group of wineries now includes Santa Helena, who made the trophy-winning Pinot Noir that is just £7.99 at the Co-op described in [Does Chile make decent Pinot?](#) published today, Altaïr described in [Altaïr – a Chilean vertical](#) by Julia, and Tabalí that has a pretty impressive track record in the [Wines of Chile Awards](#) and producer of a [sweet wine of the week](#) in 2007. My colleague Peter Richards who specialises in Chile wrote a very good account of (fairly) recent upheavals at this company, the second biggest in Chile after Concha y Toro, in his excellent book *The Wines of Chile* (Mitchell Beazley 2006).

Wine lovers outside the UK in search of proof of Chilean proficiency with Sauvignon Blanc might like to investigate the wines of Casa Marin. They are usually considerably more expensive than the mass-market brand Castillo de Molina but the **Casa Marin, Cipreses Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2009 San Antonio** is looking extremely impressive and the previous vintage **Casa Marin, Cipreses Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc 2009 San Antonio**, which is currently in commercial circulation in the UK and US, is almost as good and not yet at its peak. [Hennings](#) have just reduced it from £15.99 to £7.99 (despite its having garnered 91 Parker points – a real deal). It can be found in the US from \$19.95. There's a lovely green freshness to this wine, which will surely have a much longer life than the Castillo de Molina.

I will be reporting in more detail with my (and Richard Hemming's) tasting notes from the recent [big Chilean tasting](#) in London.

