Santa Digna, Estelado Ros□ 2011 Chile

30 Jan 2013 by Jancis Robinson

From $15.10, £11.95, CA$24.99

Find this wine

This is the most extraordinary wine, a very delicious, well-made fizz that is really quite delicate - and made from Pais, the most widely grown grape in southern Chile, and one that is usually scorned as barely worthy of making civilised wine.

Pais is known as Criolla Chica in Argentina (where it is similarly reviled) and Mission in California. As we outline in *Wine Grapes*, it has been shown by DNA analysis to be identical to the Spanish variety Listán Prieto, today grown only on the Canary islands. In Chile it is grown mainly in Maule and Bío Bío and most of it is used to make cheap pink wine sold in cardboard cartons on the domestic market. But back in 2007, a project was undertaken under the auspices of the Ministry of Agriculture, the University of Talca and Miguel Torres Chile to research ways of producing something finer from this huge resource (15,000 hectares of the variety in total in Chile grown by 8,000 smallholders, making it the country's second most planted grape variety after Cabernet Sauvignon). The idea is to help the sustainability of those who grow Pais, the single variety most suited to the conditions of much of Maule and Bío Bío.

This wine, a surprise winner in the Wines of Chile Awards, is the result, a traditional-method very fine fizz with an attractively fruity taste but no excess sweetness. Obviously at this price you don't get years of autolysis but I am very impressed by how clean and attractive it is. It was made involving eight growers initially. Miguel Torres Maczassek, son of the Miguel Torres best known to the world of wine and responsible for Miguel Torres Chile, commented about this wine, 'The País varietal [he meant 'variety', of course - JR] has been forgotten and undervalued for a long time and recently rediscovered for the elaboration of wines of quality. This will allow helping the small producers of this varietal to place the product on the market, raising the value of this raw material and thus rescuing it from the uncertain future it had been facing for many years. We are rescuing the viticulture of 500 years ago.'

I suspect the Conquistadores were blissfully ignorant of the traditional method of sparkling winemaking but the results speak for themselves. I can thoroughly recommend this wine as a great-value fizz with far more character and refreshment than any industrial Prosecco and a refinement that many a Cava lacks. I first came across this wine when visiting Torres in Catalunya last September. I couldn't help wondering whether Torres might not start making fizz in Spain and indeed they admitted that Miguel Torres Maczassek's sister Mireia is working on producing a top-quality Cava. Actually it's not clear whether it will be sold specifically as a Cava or whether Torres, like other producers of fine Spanish fizz, will choose to sell it outside the massive Cava category.

Total production of the **Santa Digna, Estelado Rosé 2011 Chile** is close to 7,000 cases and it is quite widely disributed with wine-searcher listings in the UK, US, Canada and Korea. Those representing UK importers Fells assure me that the wine is available from Alfred the Grape of Marlow, Roberts & Speight of Beverley, Blyth Valley Wines, The Vineyard of Dorking, Eagles Wines in London and Soho Wine Supply in London, who, as usual, have the lowest price, £11.95.

Find this wine