

Today has been a busy one. I have been organising one of our popular monthly wine dinners here at Sharrow Bay. These wine dinners involve experts from the vineyards themselves visiting Sharrow Bay to give expert talks to our customers over dinner on their vineyard. Rather than the wine being matched to the food selection, the menu is designed around the wine selection, all of which this month comes from the producer, Casa Silva. This month has proved to be a sell-out and as Casa Silva is from Chile I felt this country would provide an interesting topic for this month's topic.

Wine has been made in Chile since the Spaniards came over. It is believed that the conquistador Cortez planted the first vines; therefore Chilean wine isn't a new phenomenon as it has been around for at least 500 years. However, for most of this time Chilean wine remained in obscurity. A lot of this stems from the fact that throughout history Spain (and other European nations) would often use grapes from Chile to supplement a bad harvest. Therefore Chile was never given the opportunity to shine against its wine growing counterparts. This wasn't helped as the Chilean government added large tariffs on Chilean wine, making the price uncompetitive. Around two decades ago when I was still sipping coke in the Loire Valley blissfully unaware of what was going on in Chile, this all began to change. Foreign investment into vineyards started to pour in and the Americans began their love affair with Chilean wine because of their perfect balance between extremely low priced wines of really high quality.

Since Chilean wine is operating on a level playfield it has gone from strength to strength. A lot of that can be attributed to Chile's climate and location. Most of Chile's vineyards are in the broad valleys that lie against the Andes Mountain range. The Pacific Ocean exerts a strong influence by blowing in a cool breeze which provides possibly one of the best grape maturation processes in the world. Another aspect of Chilean wine that will help it become increasingly influential is the fact that along with common international varieties like Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Chardonnay etc Chile possesses its own grape Carmenera. This is a minor red wine grape that is occasionally used for blending in Bordeaux. For years this grape was misidentified as Merlot but this has been rectified and now Carmenera has assumed its rightful place as one of Chile's strongest offerings. Demand for this wonderful heady grape is growing as; I have seen myself, often want something different.

I believe because of the regions clear advantages and as a continued increase in investment takes place Chile will continue to grow as a major player in the world of wine. This is of course helped (especially now more than ever) by the fact that Chile provides and will continue to provide some of the best value wines around.

I hope this gives you an insight into the progression of Chilean wine and I hope to see you at Sharrow Bay at one of my wine events in the future.

A Votre Santé

Nico

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