

# Section 9 – Argentina & Chile & Uruguay

## Overview of the Regions, Wines & Grapes

### Introduction

Chile and Argentina are the two most important wine producers in South America. They sit side by side in the southernmost area of the continent, sharing the Andes mountain range. Chile sits west of the Andes, on the Pacific, and Argentina faces east, to the Atlantic. Both of these countries have had traditional wine industries that were mainly of local interest. Nowadays, their industries are focused on the export markets, mainly the US, and their wines have changed very much over the last 10 or 15 years. In looking for a place in the global wine market, both of these countries have set out to produce solid new world style wines: soft fruit, concentration and often lots of new oak.

### Chile

#### Introduction

Chile is, to this day, the only important wine producing nation that was never struck by Phylloxera. This caused an early boost for the Chilean wine industry around the turn of the 20th century while other countries were trying to get rid of the scourge. After that, Chile's wine industry turned inward, and was not significant on the world stage until the last few decades.

Winemaking in Chile started with the Spanish missionaries who brought with them the País grape, which is virtually the same as the Mission grape used by the missionaries in North America. It is still grown in some areas. Wealthy landowners in Chile often established wineries, and the model was always France, and of course Bordeaux. So, most plantings in Chile are of Bordeaux varieties.

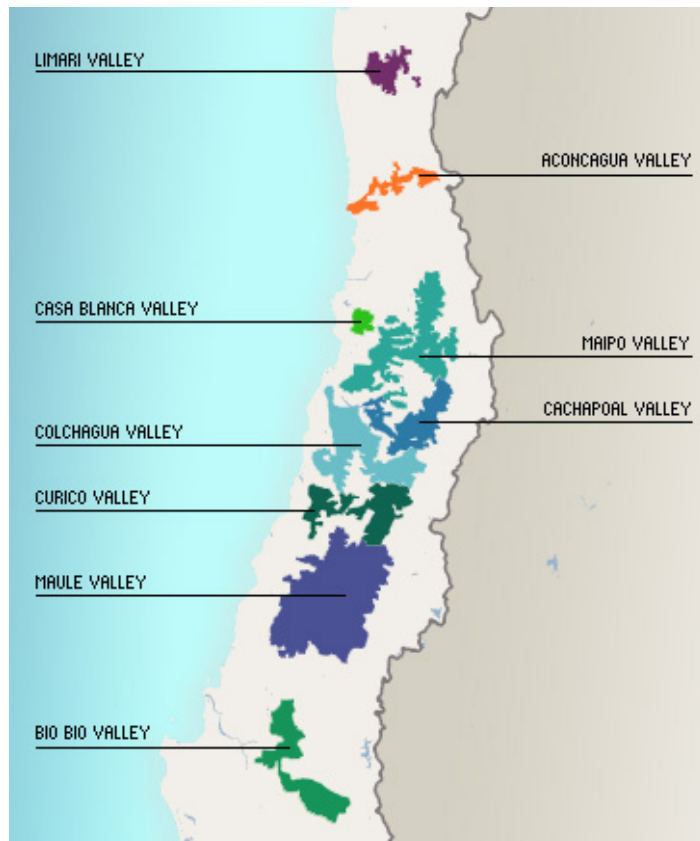
Carmenere is Chile's flagship grape variety, in the mold of Australia's Shiraz and New Zealand's Sauvignon Blanc. This grape originated in Bordeaux, where it was used exclusively as a blending grape. The twist to this story is that until not so long ago, no-one really knew it was there! For a long time, Chilean wine producers thought that they were growing Merlot grapes, when in fact they were actually growing Carmenere. A French ampelographer noticed the mistake, and the rest is history. Carmenere all but disappeared in Bordeaux after Phylloxera struck, but Chile got the vines prior to that time.

And that was not the only case of mistaken identity. For many years Chile didn't seem to be able to make a decent Sauvignon Blanc. They tried everything and nothing worked ... until they realized that what they had in their vineyards wasn't Sauvignon Blanc, but rather the lesser Sauvignonasse! Now that the vineyards are being replanted with true Sauvignon Blanc, Chilean Sauvignon Blancs have become some of the best of the New World.

#### Regions

Chile is a long slender country, and most of the wine growing regions are a string of valleys running along its center. Where the coastal range of the Andes has gaps, the influence of the Pacific is stronger and the weather is wetter and colder. Most of the valleys, however, are very dry, and viticulture would be impossible without irrigation. So, let's look at Chile's winegrowing regions:

- **The Casablanca Valley:** The Casablanca Valley is located in the northern Aconcagua region. It is a cool climate region heavily influenced by the Pacific, since this area is not sheltered by the



coastal range. Fogs cover the vineyards just like in many areas of California and this creates great conditions for cool climate varieties. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are the best varieties produced here.

- **The Central Valley:** The Central Valley is Chile's largest and most important region. It is divided into several sub-regions, each with its own characteristics.
  - **The Maipo Valley:** This sub-region is known for producing great Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines. It sits right around the city of Santiago, Chile's capital.
  - **Rapel Valley:** This valley contains the sub-region of Colchagua, which is gaining a great reputation for its wines made from Bordeaux varieties, including its Carmeneres.
  - Further south, but still within the Central Valley region are the **Curico** and **Maule Valleys**. Numerous red and white international varieties are grown here.

## Argentina



### Introduction

Argentina's wine industry has a long history for volume but not necessarily for quality until recently. Like Chile, Argentina also has a 'flagship' variety. And like Chile it more and more produces wines in the international style. Argentina's flagship variety is the Malbec grape. Malbec, like Carmeneres is a blending grape in Bordeaux. However, Malbec has a long history of making wines based on its own merits. The traditional region of Cahors in southwestern France has been famous for Malbec-based wines for centuries. In its new world incarnation, Malbec makes fruity, deeply colored and mostly easy drinking wines. Argentina has been very successful with this grape variety. Argentina also has its own white grape variety. Torrontés, when made to retain its acidity can be a wonderful wine. It is very aromatic, reminiscent of Muscat or Gewurztraminer, but is vinified dry. Although not as well known as Malbec, this grape is rising in popularity.

### Regions

- **Mendoza:** This is Argentina's largest and most important wine region. Most of Argentina's vineyards are at elevation, for it would be too hot to grow the grapes on the valley floor. Vineyard plantings start at 1600 feet above sea level, and go all the way to 6000 feet and more. All sorts of international grape varieties are grown in Mendoza.
  - One of Mendoza's sub-regions is Lujan de Cuyo. Some of the best Malbec's made in Argentina come from this region.
- **Salta:** This province in the north of the country is another important wine growing region. Vineyards here are at extremely high elevations to avoid the extreme heat.
  - Cafayate, a cool sub-region of Salta, is known to produce the best Torrontes. Although they develop a fairly ripe aromatic character, these wines retain crisp acidity.
- **Rio Negro:** This region is a cool wine growing region in the south of the country. It is known for cool climate white varieties, and also for Malbec made in a more restrained and structured style.

## Uruguay



Uruguay is the fourth most important wine producer in South America after Chile, Argentina and Brazil. Uruguayan wines have a long tradition and a growing recognition in the world market. The history of Uruguayan grapes and wines is as old as the country; Vineyards in URUGUAY have a 250 year of history, even though its progressive development began less than a century ago. The first grapevines were brought directly from Spain, as early as the first half of the 18th Century, followed by the Tannat (Harriague) and Folle Noire (Vidiella) from the Southwest Bordeaux-France. The year of 1870 marks the beginning of commercial winemaking. In the 1970's, the Uruguayan wine industry initiated a new era towards excellency, renewing wine-stocks and perfecting the process of wine making and production. In 1988 the Vitivinicultural National Institute (INAVI) was created to coordinate the efforts of the State and of the wine makers, to develop and modernize the sector and to study and plan its economy. It promotes quality and disseminates knowledge of

wine as a means to stimulate its consumption. Consequently, Uruguayan viticulture has changed considerably over the past twenty years. The new plantations were mainly established with French imported vines of noble varieties. The wines produced from the new plantations are elaborated with modern techniques, and their type and quality allows them to compete with some of the world's finest wines. The wines from Tannat grape are wines that will repay keeping, although, they are already drinking well now. Made in a number of styles, this grape is a deeply colored, tannic, astringent and intense.

## Brazil

### Overview

90% of Brazilian wine comes from the mountainous regions of the most southern state of the Brazilian Federation, called Rio Grande do Sul. Currently, local winemakers supply the market with wines of outstanding quality.

Brazilian winemaking is one of the best-equipped industries in South America thanks to foreign companies such as Chandon, Cinzano, Martini and others. During the last twenty or thirty years, these companies have invested large amounts of money in the restoration of local vineyards and wineries. . You can find technologies of both domestic and foreign origin in all the wineries of Brazil. The casks and oak chips produced in Rio Grande do Sul are made of imported French or American oak components. Almost 95% of all wineries producing fine wines are family businesses. Wine tourism is well organized there, and Vale dos Vinhedos is well prepared

Vineyards

There are about 78,000 hectares of vineyards located in the states of Rio Grande do Sul (about 40,000 hectares), Santa Catarina, Parana, Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais and Pernambuco. There are about 16,000 producers.

### Varieties

Brazil grows all fine wine varieties. White wines: Riesling Italic, Malvasia, Sauvignon, Semillon, Chardonnay, Gewurtztraminer, Pinot Bianco and Moscato. Red wines: Merlot, Cabernet, Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Gamay, Syrah, Tannat, Pinot Noir, and also Nebbiolo and Barbera.

Legislation

### Wine Laws

The regulations for viticulture have not yet been fully defined; for example, there is no compulsory deadline for harvesting. However, as every wine in the world, Brazilian wines comply with certain compulsory labelling regulations. The law stipulates the following identification marks:

- The wine producer's and the bottler's name
- The region and winery address
- Name, fineness, classification, type and origin of the product

- Agricultural area and the registration number of the product
- The **INDUSTRIA BRASILEIRA** sign
- Net volume
- Actual alcoholic strength by volume
- All used additives or their code and class

It is forbidden to put a false geographical indication on the label. The most common type of wine, the slightly sweetened "vinho de mesa" (table wine), must be indicated "suave" or "doce" (dry or sweet), printed on the label. Sparkling wines must be indicated with the method of production (gaseificado - aerated). This word must be printed in letters sized min. 50 % of the biggest word and must be in the same colour as the other information.

### Explanatory Notes

**Comum** - wine produced from hybrids and American vine

**Seco** - wine containing less than 5 g/l of sugar

**Leve** - wine containing 1 to 10 g/l of sugar

**Meio doce** - wine containing 5 to 20 g/l of sugar

**Doce ou Suave** - wine containing more than 20 g/l of sugar

**Varietal** - wine produced from min. 60 % of the grape variety stated on the label

**Vinho de mesa** - wine containing 10 to 13 % of alcohol

**Vinho**

