

Berlin Tasting – Game changer for Chilean wines



On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of The Berlin Tastings, **Steven Spurrier** looks back not only on that momentous journey, but also reminisces about the circumstances surrounding The Judgement of Paris

Atasting in front of a packed house at Vinexpo Hong Kong on the morning of May 28th, 2014 with Asia's first Master of Wine, Jeannie Cho Lee and myself seated on either side of the host, Chile's Eduardo Chadwick, wrapped up for me a magnificent voyage that I have undertaken with Eduardo since a January morning in Berlin in 2004.

Over that very cold weekend in Berlin at the newly opened Ritz Carlton Hotel, Eduardo Chadwick had planned seminars on his three flagship wines – Don Maximiano, Viñedo Chadwick and Seña – to be followed by a blind tasting of these wines against First Growths from the Médoc and Super Tuscans by 50 of Europe's most respected palates. Facing them was Eduardo, flanked by René Gabriel of Geneva and myself. There were 12 wines in all and when the results were read out from the sixth wine upwards, I noticed that Eduardo smiled and visibly relaxed. Seña 2000 had come in equal fourth with Château Margaux 2001. Château Lafite-Rothschild 2000 was third, but Eduardo had already got the recognition he was after, so he was hardly paying attention when it was announced that Seña 2001 had come second and Viñedo Chadwick 2000 had been placed first! Perhaps nobody in the room was more stunned than Eduardo himself and this event was quickly named, "The Berlin Tasting", tipping its hat to "The Paris Tasting" of May 1976.

What Eduardo Chadwick was looking for in 2004 was recognition that his wines, and by extension the other fine wines of Chile, could stand up against the benchmarks of the wine world. This was exactly what I was

after in 1976, having been so impressed by the Chardonnays and Cabernets that had been brought into L'Academie du Vin in Paris by visiting California producers, that it seemed important to show a selection of these to a small group of France's top tasters. This tasting was not originally planned to be "blind", but then I realised that with the exception of Aubert de Villaine of the Domaine de la Romanee-Conti who was married to a girl from San Francisco, none of the other tasters would have ever come across wines from California



Eduardo Chadwick, Jeannie Cho Lee and Steven Spurrier

before, so I selected the best red Bordeaux and white Burgundies to be compared in a blind tasting.... and the rest is history.

Like Eduardo Chadwick, the last thing I expected was one of the California wines to come first and certainly not in both categories. I would have been content with, say, a third and a fifth out of the ten wines in each flight, for California would have thus received the recognition that I thought it deserved. Results like these create negative as well as positive comments, in some cases utter disbelief and it was said that I had asked the judges to compare "apples with oranges" and that the red wines of Bordeaux needed to age, while those from California did not, so in 1986 I held a tasting of just the Clarets and Cabernets in New York, when another Napa Valley wine came top and two others in the first five.

I had no intention of doing a 20-year-on tasting, but was persuaded to hold a 30-year event in May 2006, simultaneously in Napa and London, with the same number of nine judges at each. This time, when the marks from both places were combined, California emerged taking the first five places! If this proved anything, it was that red wines from California could mature just as well as their Bordeaux counterparts. In recent years, Eduardo Chadwick has conclusively proved this through vertical tastings of his flagship wine Seña, alongside older vintages of the Left Bank First Growths.

The results in events like the Paris Tasting or the Berlin Tasting can be taken as a "one off" and while my two re-runs of the 1976 tasting proved the value of California wines, Eduardo Chadwick took his search for consistency to quite another level. Over ten years he held no fewer than 22 tastings, always placing his Icon wines in blind comparison against the very best from Bordeaux and Tuscany, always judged by the best palates in each country.

Here is the Chadwick Odyssey: 2004 – Berlin; 2005 – São Paulo; 2006 – Tokyo and Toronto; 2008 – Copenhagen, Seoul,



Eduardo Chadwick signing copies of "The Berlin Tasting: Uncorking the potential of Chile's terroir"

Beijing and Amsterdam; 2009 – London and Stockholm; 2010 – New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Hong Kong and Budapest; 2011 – Zurich and Helsinki; 2012 – Moscow; 2013 Dubai, Seoul, São Paulo and Santiago. Across these tastings, the Chilean wines took 55% of the top five places and were placed in the top three, 90% of the time. Such consistency is a fine tribute to wines that were considered "unknowns" just over a decade ago.

The ability of top Chilean wines to improve with age was conclusively proved in the final tasting in Hong Kong, with just eight of Eduardo's Icon wines, not served blind, vintages ranging across 22 years from 1989 up to 2011. The first three were Don Maximiano, named after Don Maximiano Errázuriz, Eduardo Chadwick's direct ancestor and founder of Viña Errázuriz in 1870. Beginning with the 1989, 100% Cabernet Sauvignon, which still showed internal warmth of fruit, we moved to 2005 (85% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Cabernet Franc, 5% Petit Verdot, 3% Shiraz) whose superbly robust yet elegant

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Chadwick's flagship wines

flavours will ensure a long life, to end on 2011 (75% Cabernet Sauvignon, 10% Carménère, 10% Petit Verdot, 5% Malbec) that was already showing velvety smoothness and perfect balance, the hallmark of a great wine. The fourth wine in the tasting was Kai 2010, Errázuriz flagship wine from the Carménère grape (with just 4% Petit Verdot), a cousin of Bordeaux's Merlot and now almost exclusively planted in Chile. Deep in colour with a wonderfully spicy nose, beautiful lift and texture on the palate, this is the opposite of Argentina's Malbec, with my notes reading "charming Margaux-like flavours."

Then came three wines from Señal, the joint-venture between Eduardo Chadwick and Napa's Robert Mondavi, whose first vintage in 1995 was 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 30% Merlot/Carménère, still showing a fine touch of vigour despite the young vines. The next wine was Señal 2000 (77% Cabernet Sauvignon, 5.6% Carménère, 17.4% Merlot) full in colour and spice, bitter chocolate on the palate and great harmony, to be followed by Señal 2011 (58% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Carménère, 15% Merlot, 7% Petit Verdot, 5% Cabernet Franc) with a superb nose of red berry fruits,

oak perfectly blended in, and an outstanding blend of vigour and elegance, with the latter emerging over the next 20 years.

Finally came Viñedo Chadwick 2000, the 100% Cabernet Sauvignon from another family estate in the Alto Maipo Valley south of Santiago, where Eduardo had persuaded his father to sacrifice his beloved polo field to vines, the wine that won the Berlin Tasting in January 2004. These are my notes: "Still full colour, combination of warmth and spice on the nose, shows smoothness and depth on the palate lifted by energy and elegance with a superb finish."

Such words do not describe my emotions in re-tasting the wine which, without any doubt, put Chile firmly into the minds of the world's wine connoisseurs, the wine which, along with Señal 2001 and Señal 2000, started Eduardo Chadwick on the decade-long journey during which I have had the honour to accompany him. The results can best be summed up by Jeannie Cho Lee, "Over the past ten years and 22 blind tastings later, the message is crystal clear - top Chilean red wines can and should join the ranks of the best wines from around the world." ❖

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