

# STEVEN SPURRIER



## Chadwick and Chile: full steam ahead

**I**n the April 2004 *Decanter*, under the title 'Three Terroirs and a Victory in Berlin', I wrote about Eduardo Chadwick's blind tasting that January which saw his Viñedo Chadwick 2000 and Seña 2001 being rated above Lafite-Rothschild 2000. His Seña 2000 followed in fourth – equal to Margaux 2001. Fired up by this result, Chadwick, fifth generation of the Errázuriz wine estates founded by Don Maximiano Errázuriz in the Aconcagua Valley in 1870, held a series of similar tastings around the world. This May he wrapped them up into a baker's dozen with tastings in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, ending a seven-year odyssey during which he successfully achieved recognition for his icon brands and Chilean wines in general.

I have to declare an interest in these tastings, as I was invited to co-chair the first one in Berlin and had the pleasure of co-chairing many of the others. Chadwick knew that the only way to get recognition for unknown wines was to go against the benchmarks in a blind tasting. It was the same recognition I sought for the Cabernet Sauvignons and Chardonnays made by California's 'boutique' wineries when I held the Judgment of Paris tasting in 1976. Only by having a panel of experts compare the wines blind against Burgundy and Bordeaux benchmarks did I realise how this might be achieved. That the interlopers were placed first in each category stunned me as much as his first two places in Berlin did Chadwick, but we had wanted recognition – and we got it.

In his first 10 tastings, Chadwick had limited the benchmarks to Bordeaux first growths and Tuscan icons such as Sassicaia, Solaia and Tignanello, always from similar

vintages to his own wines. In the US, he scaled the European wines back to Haut-Brion, Lafite-Rothschild and Sassicaia, adding Opus One and Stag's Leap Wine Cellars SLV. To his trio of Don Max, Seña (the joint venture with Robert Mondavi, now 100% Errázuriz) and Viñedo Chadwick, he added the new Kai (87% Carmenere) and La Cumbre (97% Shiraz), also from Aconcagua Valley. The vintage of all 10 wines was 2006.

Before this year, the nine tastings following Berlin – San Paolo, Tokyo, Toronto, Copenhagen, Seoul, Beijing, Amsterdam, London and Stockholm – had notched up four top places for Chile

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against wines much better known and far more expensive, and 29 out of the 50 top five places. With panels of 50 tasters made up from the leading retailers, restaurateurs and critics, the top five wines in each city were: New York – Kai, Opus One, Haut-Brion, Don Max, Lafite-Rothschild; Chicago – Stag's Leap, Kai, Lafite-Rothschild, Haut-Brion, Opus One; Los Angeles – Stag's Leap, Haut-Brion, Opus One, Lafite-Rothschild, Kai.

This very consistent ranking gave Errázuriz, after seven years and 13 cities, five first places and 33 of the 65 top five wines – 51%. Chadwick can be seen as a remarkable ambassador both for his

company and country, especially since the wine that triumphed in the US was from Chile's own Carmenere, a grape that just a decade ago was mistaken for Merlot.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find him on the panel of Chile 2020, discussing the country's wine ambitions for the next decade. Michael Cox, UK director of Wines of Chile, gave me the bullet points: Chile to be perceived as the leading producer of premium wines in the New World; develop the Sustainability Code to reinforce the message of Chile's viticultural 'naturalness'; promote Chile's increasing diversity of geography, climates, variety and style; emphasise Chile's value; elevate the status and image of Carmenere; identify more wine 'personalities' who convey Chile's newfound confidence; increase Chile's penetration in key growth markets; work with the Chilean government to promote wine tourism.

Cox concluded: 'I'm hugely optimistic about the future and Chile's ability to make multi-dimensional wines with flair, diversity, personality and character. The tectonic plates of the wine world are shifting inexorably and Chile, no stranger to seismic activity, is now a more imposing figure than ever on the world wine map.'

Argentina impresses me with the increasing range of world-class wines from Patagonia in the south to Salta in the north; Uruguay remains consistent and, across the border; Brazil's southern vineyards are full of pleasant surprises. But Chile takes the crown for diversity. Each year a new region seems to open up, higher slopes conquered and sustainable viticulture almost goes without saying.

These elements are summed up by the creation in 2006 of Viña Vik, when Norway's Alexander Vik bought 1,750 hectares of the previously unknown Millahue Valley on the north slopes of the Apalta Valley. Patrick Valette, whose family owned Châteaux Pavie and Pavie-Decesse, is the manager and his 2009 vintage is well on the way to fulfilling Vik's aim of creating a 'holistic grand cru exceptionnel' in Chile. **D**

**Steven Spurrier is *Decanter's* consultant editor, and a renowned taster**

### WHAT STEVEN'S BEEN DRINKING THIS MONTH...

#### CHILE'S PLACE AT THE TOP TABLE

Twelve of the family around the garden table on the hottest evening of the year so far: **Charles Heidsieck mise en cave Champagne 2004** (2003 base wine), sprightly and creamy; **Méo-Camuzet, Hautes Côtes de Nuits, Burgundy 2004**,

which matched the sorrel soup and cold poached salmon to perfection; a robust **Errázuriz, Don Maximiano, Chile 2005** with cheese; and a surprisingly young **Château de Fesles, Bonnezeaux, Loire 1976** with the first local strawberries.