



Chilean wine
From Wikipedia

History

European *Vitis vinifera* vines were brought to Chile by Spanish conquistadors and [missionaries](#) in the 16th century around 1554.

During the Spanish rule, vineyards were restricted in production with the stipulation that the Chilean should purchase the bulk of their wines directly from Spain itself. y. The market loss caused the huge surplus of grapes to be made into [pisco](#) and [aguardiente](#).

In the 18th century, Chile was known mostly for its [sweet wines](#) made from the Pais and Muscatel grapes.

20th century

Prior to the 1980s, the vast majority of Chilean wine was considered low quality and mostly consumed domestically. As awareness of Chile's favorable growing conditions for viticulture increased so did foreign investment in Chilean wineries. This period saw many technical advances in winemaking as Chile earned a reputation for reasonably priced premium quality wines. Chile began to export extensively, becoming the third leading exporter, after France and [Italy](#), into the United States by the turn of the 21st century.

Climate and geography

Chile is a long, narrow country that is geographically and climatically dominated by the [Andes](#) to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Chile's vineyards are found along an 800-mile stretch of land from [Atacama Region](#) to the [Bio-Bio Region](#) in the south. The climate is varied with the northern regions being very hot and dry compared to the cooler, wetter regions in the south. In the [Valle](#)

Central around **Santiago**, the climate is dry with an average of 38 centimeters of rain and little risk of springtime **frost**.

Most of Chile's premium wine regions are dependent on **irrigation** to sustain vineyards, getting the necessary water from melting snow caps in the Andes. For the rest of Chile's wine regions, the Coastal Ranges serve as a buffer from the current and also acts as a **rain shadow**. The vineyards in these regions are planted on the **valley** plains of the Andes foothills along a major river such as the **Maipo, Rapel** and **Maule Rivers**.

Viticulture

There is not much vintage variation due to the reliability of favorable weather with little risk of summer time frost or harvest time rains. For the Chilean wine regions in the Valle Central, the Andes and Coastal Ranges create a rain shadow effect which traps the warm arid air in the region. At night, cool air comes into the area from the Andes which dramatically drops the temperature. This helps maintain high levels of acidity to go with the **ripe fruit** that grapes develop with the long hours of uninterrupted sunshine that they get during the day.

The **soil composition** of Chile's vineyards varies from the **clay** dominated landscapes of Colchagua, which is thus heavily planted with the clay-loving Merlot, to the mixture of **loam, limestone** and **sand** found in other regions. In the southern Rapel and parts of Maule, **tuffeau** soil is present with **volcanic** soil being found in parts of Curico and Bio-Bio.

Winemaking

Chile has benefited from an influx of foreign investment and winemaking talent that began in the late 20th century. **Winemakers** introduced new technology and styles that helped Chilean wineries produce more internationally recognized wine styles. One such improvement was the use of oak. Historically Chilean winemakers had aged their wines in **barrels** made from **rauli** beechwood which imparted to the wine a unique taste that many international tasters found unpleasant. Gradually the wineries began to convert to French and American oak or stainless steel tanks for aging. Financial investment manifested in the form of European and American winemakers opening up their own wineries or collaborating with existing Chilean wineries to produce new brands. These include:

- **Robert Mondavi**, collaboration with **Viña Errázuriz** to produce **Sena**
- **Miguel A. Torres**, Catalan winemaker opened **Miguel Torres Chile** in 1979
- **Château Lafite Rothschild**, collaboration with **Los Vascos**
- Bruno Prats, Owner of **Château Cos d'Estournel**, and Paul Pontallier, technical director of **Chateau Margaux**, opened **Domaine Paul Bruno**
- **Château Mouton Rothschild**, collaboration with **Concha y Toro Winery** to produce **Almaviva**

Wine laws

Chile's wine laws are more similar to the US **appellation system** than to France's **Appellation d'origine contrôlée** that most of Europe has based their wine laws on. Chile's system went into effect in 1995 and established the boundaries of the country's wine regions and established regulations for **wine labels**. There are no restrictions of **grape varieties** or viticultural practices. Wines are required to have at least 75% of a grape variety if it is to be consumed within Chile. Vintage-dated wines are also required to have at least 75% of grapes harvested in the named year. If it is to be exported, it must contain 85% of the varietal listed on the label as well as at least 85% from the designated **vintage** year. Exported wines also have to meet minimum alcohol percentage requirements; white wines must reach a minimum level of 12% ABV, while reds must reach a minimum level of 11.5% ABV. To list a particular wine region, 85% is also the minimum requirement of grapes that need to be from that region. Among several labeling terms used to add further definition to a wine's style, the term "Reserva Especial" has no legal definition or meaning. However, there are aging requirements for wines labeled with other specific terms: for "especial," it is two years; four years for "reserva," and a minimum of six years for "gran vino."

Grapes and wines

Over twenty grape varieties are grown in Chile, mainly a mixture of Spanish and French varieties, but many wineries are increasing experimentation in higher numbers. For most of Chile's history, Pais was the most widely planted grape only recently getting passed by Cabernet Sauvignon. Other red wine varieties include [Merlot](#), [Carménère](#), [Zinfandel](#), [Petite Sirah](#), Cabernet franc, Pinot noir, [Syrah](#), [Sangiovese](#), [Barbera](#), [Malbec](#), and [Carignan](#). White wine varieties include Chardonnay, Sauvignon blanc, [Sauvignon vert](#), Sémillon, Riesling, [Viognier](#), [Torontel](#), [Pedro Ximénez](#), Gewürztraminer and [Muscat of Alexandria](#).

Chilean winemakers have been developing a distinct style for their Cabernet Sauvignon, producing an easy drinking wine with soft [tannins](#) and flavors of [mint](#), [black currant](#), [olives](#) and smoke. The country's Chardonnays are less distinctive, following more the [stereotypical](#) New World style. While [sparkling wines](#) have been made since 1879, they have not yet established a significant place in Chile's wine portfolio.

The Wine Regions of Chile

Chile's appellation system, known as Denomination of Origin (Denominación de Origen) or D.O., is made up of four major regions, from north to south: **Coquimbo**, **Aconcagua**, **Central Valley and the Southern Region**. Each of these has several sub-regions, each with distinct climatic features and terroir.

D.O. Coquimbo: Elqui Valley: Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay, merlot, carmenère

Limarí Valley: Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, chardonnay, carmenère

Choapa Valley: Main grapes: Syrah, cabernet sauvignon

D.O. Aconcagua: Aconcagua Valley: Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, syrah, carmenère

Casablanca Valley: Main grapes: Chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, merlot, pinot noir.

San Antonio and Leyda Valley: Main grapes: chardonnay, sauvignon blanc, pinot noir

D.O. Central Valley

Maipo Valley

Nestled between the Andes and the Coastal mountains, Maipo is one of Chile's largest regions and is divided into three distinct eastwest zones: Alto Maipo, Central Maipo and Pacific Maipo.

Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, chardonnay, carmenère

Vineyards stretch eastward from Santiago to the Andes and westward to the coast to form three distinct sectors of the Maipo Valley best known for its well-balanced red wines. Alto Maipo reaches into the foothills and produces some of Chile's leading Cabernets. Central Maipo is one of the country's oldest and most diverse productive regions, and Coastal Maipo—a relative newcomer—benefits from the cool maritime influence that slides over and between the Coastal Mountains.

Cachapoal Valley

One of two sub-appellations that make up the Rapel region, Cachapoal is known primarily for red grapes.

Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, carmenère, sauvignon blanc

Just south of Santiago, the Rapel Valley is Chile's agricultural heartland and further divided into two winegrowing sectors. Cachapoal, the northernmost, is known primarily for red grapes. Cachapoal Alto stretches eastward into the Andean foothills and produces elegant, well-balanced Cabernets and red blends.

Colchagua Valley

The larger, southern sub-appellation making up the Rapel region, the majority of wineries are concentrated in the centre of the valley.

Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, carmenère, syrah

The southernmost portion of the Rapel Valley is one of Chile's best known wine regions and has earned much applause for its full-bodied Cabernet, Carménère, Syrah, and Malbec, and its wines

regularly appear high on the world's lists of leading wines.

Curicó Valley (D.O. Central Valley)

Winegrowing is this region's primary industry, where more than 30 varieties of wine grapes have been planted since the mid-1800s.

Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, sauvignon blanc, merlot, chardonnay

Diversity is king in Curicó, where more than 30 varieties of wine grapes have grown since the mid-1800s, and winegrowing is its primary industry.

Curicó's modern winemaking history began when Spanish producer Miguel Torres began his first New World endeavor here in the 1970s and opened the doors to a wave of foreign investment in Chile's New World wine paradise.

Maule Valley (D.O. Central Valley)

Maule is the largest, and one of the oldest, wine growing regions in Chile. It is made up of three climatic zones: coastal, mid-valley and mountain.

Main grapes: Cabernet sauvignon, merlot, sauvignon blanc, carmenère

This traditional and long overlooked wine valley—the largest and one of the oldest—has attracted renewed and much-deserved attention of late. Old-bush, dry-farmed vineyards that predate the memories of those who tend them now produce exciting, naturally balanced field blends of Carignan, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, and other yet to be identified varieties. Newer plantations include Merlot, Cabernet Franc, and Carmenere with bright acidity and juicy fruit.

D.O. Southern Region

Itata Valley: Main grapes: Moscatel de alexandria, cabernet sauvignon, chardonnay

Bío Bío Valley: Main grapes: Moscatel de alexandria, cabernet sauvignon, pinot noir, gewürztraminer

Malleco Valley: Malleco is currently Chile's southernmost appellation