



Tim's Wine Market

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By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

It is hard to exaggerate the dramatic rise in quality of the wines from Chile over the past decade. From my early days in the business the wines of Chile were sold as cheap, passable examples that somehow never lived up to their pedigree. This has a lot to do with the way the industry was positioned during the rule of Augusto Pinochet and the years after, when wine was seen as just another commodity. Then in the early 2000s many established wineries began a generational transition, with the younger winemakers better trained and with a global understanding of quality and value. Since then the quality has skyrocketed based on much better viticulture and winemaking techniques. This month we are excited to present two very different views of modern red wine from Chile. The first is from one of the greatest names in wine and a modern view; the second is from a winery that works with ancient vines and minimal electricity. The contrast between these wines is incredibly compelling.

2021 Escudo Rojo Gran Reserva (\$25)

There are many good examples of how far the producers in Chile have evolved in the past two decades but this one stands out not only for quality but also amazing value. This is no surprise as Escudo Rojo is the brainchild of the team behind the Baron Philippe de Rothschild wines; Chateau Mouton-Rothschild and Opus One. While there is a flagship wine, Escudo Rojo Baronessa P., that sells for \$80, the star of their lineup to me is this amazing blend that is one-third the price. While there are so many possibilities we could present to show off the new quality of Chile, this wine stands out for a number of reasons. Probably the most important is that it represents a culmination of improvements in viticulture as producers have shifted their vineyards away from the valley floor and into the hills where the soils are not as rich. This creates some stress on the vines, naturally reducing yields and improving concentration. Nowhere is this better seen than the area south of the capital of Santiago called the Maipo Valley.

The Maipo Valley, located just south of Santiago is one of the oldest wine regions in the country. Vineyards planted here benefit from the altitude of the Andes Mountains as well as the cool breezes of the Pacific. Long before the Rothschilds arrived French winemakers moved to the area in the early 1900s when fleeing the effects of phylloxera in Europe. This moderate climate, along with the region's proximity to the capital city of Santiago made it an ideal location for winemaking and a newly independent Chile welcomed French winemakers with open arms. Originally all of the vineyards were planted near the river, on rich sandy soils that were resistant to the phylloxera louse. However, after nearly 100 years of growing, producers realized that for quality wine the soils created too much vigor in the vines, increasing yields but not quality. The Rothschild team led the movement of plantings in the hills where the soils are rockier and have less organic material, consistent with their other world class estates.

To make this wine, fruit is sourced from a combination of estate-owned and partner vineyards farmed to their specifications. The finished blend is composed of predominantly Cabernet Sauvignon and Carménère, the Bordeaux variety most commonly grown in the Maipo Valley. Small amounts of Petit Verdot and Syrah are included for additional tannin and complexity. Once dry, the finished wine is matured in a combination of new and gently used barrels for 1 year before bottling.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for at least half an hour. Once this wine has some time to open up, it displays notes of blackcurrant preserve, black plum, cassis, clove, cedar, and vanilla. Drink now through 2026 with grilled skirt steak, hamburgers with Swiss cheese and onions, or roast duck.

2019 Gonzalez Bastias Pais "Matorral" (\$30)

In contrast to the modern wine above, this bottling shows how much of the new movement in Chile is embracing some of the oldest, and far less fashionable varieties. In this case the wine is made from Pais, which for decades has been primarily grown for distillation into Pisco. Recently a group of young winemakers have embraced the variety, which are often century old vines, as having potential to make incredible and distinctive wines.

Pais is the oldest continually cultivated grape variety in the Americas, grown from California to southern Chile and everywhere in between. This is no coincidence, as this variety was originally carried to Mexico by the Cortés expedition in 1520, and traveled everywhere the Spanish did. The first written record of wine production in Chile dates to 1554, where local priests tended the vines, producing wine both for sacramental purposes and refreshment. For over 300 years, this would set the stage for South American viticulture, even after independence from Spain.

In Chile's remote Maule Valley, some of the oldest surviving vines on the planet are cultivated at Gonzalez Bastias. Daniela Lorenzo and Jose Luis Gonzales Bastias are the 7th generation of winemakers to inherit this property, with many of their vines dating back over 200 years. Unfortunately, earlier this year disaster struck as the Maule Valley was subject to flooding and unprecedented rainfall. Daniela and Jose Luis survived unscathed, though much of their land remains underwater and their winery was destroyed. This has done nothing to diminish their spirits, nor dissuade them from their commitment to traditional Chilean winemaking.

To make this wine, all fruit is hand harvested and brought to the winery, where pressing occurs using traditional zaranda, a flexible mat of woven reeds that naturally extracts the juice. The wine then ferments in Chilean oak barrels, made from recycled wood. After a year in oak the wine is bottled without fining or filtration.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant it for at least half an hour. In addition, do not be afraid to serve it with a slight chill, around 60 degrees or slightly lower. On the palate, this wine is complex without being overtly "funky," with notes of dried cranberry, red cherry, dried hibiscus, leather, earth, and a hint of cayenne pepper. Drink now through 2025 with smoked turkey, enchiladas, charcuterie, or fried rice balls.

Slow Cooker Chicken Mole

I love the Mexican dish of Mole, which incorporates chocolate, chiles and nuts to create a rich, flavorful sauce. I particularly like it in November, when I am staring at 4-5 pounds of roasted turkey after Thanksgiving and trying not to be wasteful. However, I also like this version from Cook's Country for weeknight dinners when I want the flavor, but not the extensive preparation that most recipes call for. This recipe takes a couple of short cuts but the results are really good and it takes only minutes to prepare. While the directions suggest serving over rice, I shred the chicken and make enchiladas instead. This dish works nicely with both wines, or any red with bold fruit and not too much oak. - **Tim**

1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained with 1/2 cup juice reserved

1/3 cup raisins

2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder

2 tablespoons peanut butter

1 tablespoon chili powder

4 garlic cloves, minced

Salt and pepper

8 (5 to 7-ounce) bone-in chicken thighs, skin removed, trimmed

1/4 cup minced fresh cilantro

1. Combine tomatoes and reserved juice, raisins, cocoa, peanut butter, chili powder, garlic, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper in slow cooker. Season chicken with salt and pepper and nestle into slow cooker. Cover and cook until chicken is tender, 4 to 5 hours on low.

2. Transfer chicken to serving dish. Process cooking liquid in blender until smooth, about 30 seconds. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Pour 1 cup sauce over chicken and sprinkle with cilantro. Serve, passing remaining sauce separately.