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Wine On The Road Update

Wine On The Road's wine-focused, luxurious, behind-the-scenes itinerary for our newest Tuscan Tour in May of 2011 is now available online.

Check it out.



Ben Weinberg
BentheWineBerg

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Weinberg's Wine Notes #136 - Wine On The Road in South America Part I: Chile



Having fun at a wine store in Santiago, Chile

Chileans like to relax. Really, really relax, usually surrounded by family and friends. The typical Chilean wine is fruity, fun and inexpensive, seemingly custom built for this milieu.

One of the extraordinary qualities of Chilean wine country is that the devastating root louse Phylloxera is nonexistent. Chilean vines are rarely grafted. They don't need to be. Thus, Chilean

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Calendar of Events

grapes constitute the last large reservoir of ancient wine grape genetics, untouched by a pest that has radically changed winemaking just about everywhere else.

I've recently finished almost two weeks of Chilean and Argentine wine tours, sent there by Brandabout S.A. (www.brandabout.cl), a Chilean wine-focused public relations firm. This week I've been crossing Chile, a country that is approximately 4,500 kilometers long and only 200 kilometers wide at its widest point. Such strung-out terroir means this is a land of contrasts, sandwiched between the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean. Most valleys run east-west with large temperature and humidity gradients between hills and sea, and Europe's influence on language and culture means that the winemaking is a fascinating mixture of Old and New World.

This week I'll relate my Chilean wine experiences and next week is Argentina's turn. Also, my traveling partner during this South American adventure was the redoubtable Jonathon Alsop, who is the owner of the Boston Wine School (www.bostonwineschool.com).



Tasting Odfjell at Brandabout

Our first tasting was at the Brandabout offices and featured the wines of Odfjell Vineyards, which is owned by a Norwegian shipping family. I've tasted and liked Odfjell before, but this time I was captivated by the thickly textured, black-tinged Malbec Orzada from the Lontué Valley. Blueberries and black currants mingled with saddle leather and milk chocolate on the nose. The palate oozed green tea, maple, cedar and white flowers. High-toned and very long, this was a real treat.

Next on our agenda was Viña Vik, a five-year-old high-end wine operation in Colchagua. Alexander Vik is another Norwegian who understands fine wine, and he's hired several of the best winemakers and oenologists in Chile in order to produce what may become the best bottle from

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this region. While the winery only makes a single blended wine, the 2009 version (the first commercial vintage that will be released sometime later this year) showed me what could be done with this concept.



The beauty of Vina Vik

This bottle is a blend of 63 percent Carmenère (the signature grape of Chile), 34 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, two percent Cabernet Franc and one percent Syrah. The resulting dark fruit exploded from the glass, and milk chocolate and graphite rounded out the moderately acidic yet very long finish.

After a night in the Viña Vik guesthouse we headed off to Viña Montes, also in Colchagua but with additional vineyards in Casablanca. Although I'd sampled some of the Montes wines before, our tour with family scion Dennis Murray was a revelation and I quickly came to realize that this is one of the finest wine estates in the world.



Tasting with Dennis Murray of Montes

Great values abound at all levels of Montes offerings, including the Montes Alpha Chardonnay. Aged in French oak, this elixir exuded sour cherry blossom, yellow pear and a bit of Indian ghee,

with apricot and ripe red pears on the medium-length finish. Not excessively buttery at all, in fact, this wine's texture was just right.

Another top-notch offering from Montes is their flagship wine, the Montes Alpha M, a Bordeaux-style blend of 80 percent Cabernet Sauvignon, 10 percent Cabernet Franc, and five percent each of Merlot and Petite Verdot. The purple color belied the white pepper and black cherry nose, while a raspberry coulis and watermelon mid-palate coexisted harmoniously with a smooth, dark chocolate and cassis finish. This wine was so long that I could still taste it half an hour later, making it one of the finest wines I've ever tasted anywhere.



Our lunch menu at Viu Manent

Next stop on our South American tour was Viu Manent, where we enjoyed a relaxing lunch with winemaker Patricio Celedon, Export Director Jorge Cabargas Rigden, and Managing Director Jose Miguel Viu. Over a gourmet meal prepared by Cordon-Bleu-trained chef Pilar Rodriguez I grooved on the Carmenère Reserva. Carmenère is usually not my favorite wine grape, but this version delivered red bell pepper, black pepper and dark chocolate up-front, followed by Rainier cherry, cantaloupe and a certain sauvage quality that's hard to describe but tasty.

Our last Colchagua visit was at iconic Casa Silva, owned and operated by at least five generations of Silva family members. Casa Silva produces a lot of different wines, none more interesting to me than the red fruit dominated Cabernet Sauvignon Los Lingues Gran Reserva. Red cherries and raspberries met dark chocolate and malt powder to produce a smooth, sleek example of Chile's most widely planted red varietal.



Tasting al fresco at Vina Requiringua

After Colchagua came Viña Requiringua in the Curicó Valley. There I tasted the finest Chilean Sauvignon Blanc I've ever had. The grapes were actually grown in the Maule Valley, and intriguing lime leaf and quinine led the charge, with pineapple and graphite finishing the race. Not at all expensive yet this wine delivered a top quality wine drinking experience. I'd never before heard of the winery, but I will definitely seek out their bottles in the future.

We ended our Chilean wine tour at Via Wines in the Maule Valley, which is tightly focused on producing wines of exceptional quality while embracing the concept of social responsibility. Such environmental concerns are all well-and-good, but they mean nothing if the wines aren't equally impressive. Via manages to top the scale on both measures, as readily exemplified by their spicy Cabernet Franc-Carmenère Reserve blend. Red cherry and cinnamon joined allspice, cocoa, malt powder and green tea on the high, long finish. There was plenty of power here for those who need it, as well as a level of finesse that was quite appealing.

I've never before visited South America but will definitely come back. Whether we're talking about people, places, or most importantly wine, there's a lot to like. Try some of these recommendations and you'll see what I mean.

WINE ON THE ROAD IN TUSCANY, PIEDMONT AND BURGUNDY



Wine On The Road

I've always wanted to personally share the wines, places and personalities that I talk about in this column. Wine On The Road (

www.wineontheroad.com), my wine-focused, luxury touring company, now allows you to join me for the ultimate in wine country experiences with special access to top winemakers and their incomparable wines. Wine on the Road offers intimate, behind-the-scenes wine country tours that combine award-winning wines and exquisite dining and lodging with uniquely local flair and flavor.

I'm initially planning two separate tours in 2011, to the very places I talk about in this column. The first will explore Tuscany and focus on the wines of Chianti Classico and Bolgheri (home of the Super Tuscans). We'll also spend time in Lucca, a historic walled city west of Florence. This expedition will be offered twice in 2011: 5/4/11 – 5/14/11 and 10/16/11 – 10/26/11. Please go to www.wineontheroad.com/tour_tuscany.php for more information.

Other tours are being planned for Piedmont and Burgundy later in 2011. Trip details as well as pricing are currently being determined. Take a look at www.wineontheroad.com/tour_piedmont.php. You can also check into booking private groups in wine country world-wide by emailing tour@wineontheroad.com.

To secure your place with me on this tour or if you would like more information on any of our tours, please email me at benweinberg@wineontheroad.com.

Recommended:

White

Montes Alpha Chardonnay 2009 (Casablanca Valley, Chile) \$24

Viña Requingua Sauvignon Blanc 2010 (Maule Valley, Chile) \$12

Red

Odfjell Vineyards Malbec Orzada 2008 (Lontué Valley, Chile) \$20

Viña Vik Red Wine 2009 (Cachapoal Valley, Chile) \$NYR

Montes Alpha M 2007 (Santa Cruz/Apalta, Chile) \$90

Viu Manent Carmenère Reserva 2009 (Colchagua Valley, Chile) \$14

Casa Silva Cabernet Sauvignon Los Lingues Gran Reserva 2008 (Colchagua Valley, Chile) \$19

Via Wines Cabernet Franc-Carmenère 2009 (Maule Valley, Chile) \$12

January 10th, 2011 | Tags: alpha, alsop, america, argentin, behind, bordeaux, boston wine school, brandabout, burgund, cabernet, carmenere, casa silva, casablanca, Chardonnay, chile, colchagua, curico, dennis murray, franc, gran, jonathon, jorge cabargas ridgen, jose miguel vie, lontue, los lingues, luxur, m, malbec, maule, merlot, montes, note, odfjell, on, orzada, patricio celedon, petite verdot, piedmont, piemont, pilar rodrigues, recommend, reserva, road, sauvignon, sauvignon blanc, scene, south, syrah, tast, the, travel, tuscan, valley, via, vina requingua, vina vik, viu manent, weinberg, wine | Category: Articles and Columns, Ben's Blogs, Weinberg's Wine Notes | [Leave a comment](#)