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1 Wine Dude

SERIOUS WINE TALK

for the not so serious drinker



with **Joe Roberts**
certified specialist of wine



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today's top 9



1 Limoncello by: Eva Toneva



2 Butter Buns by: A little bit of everything

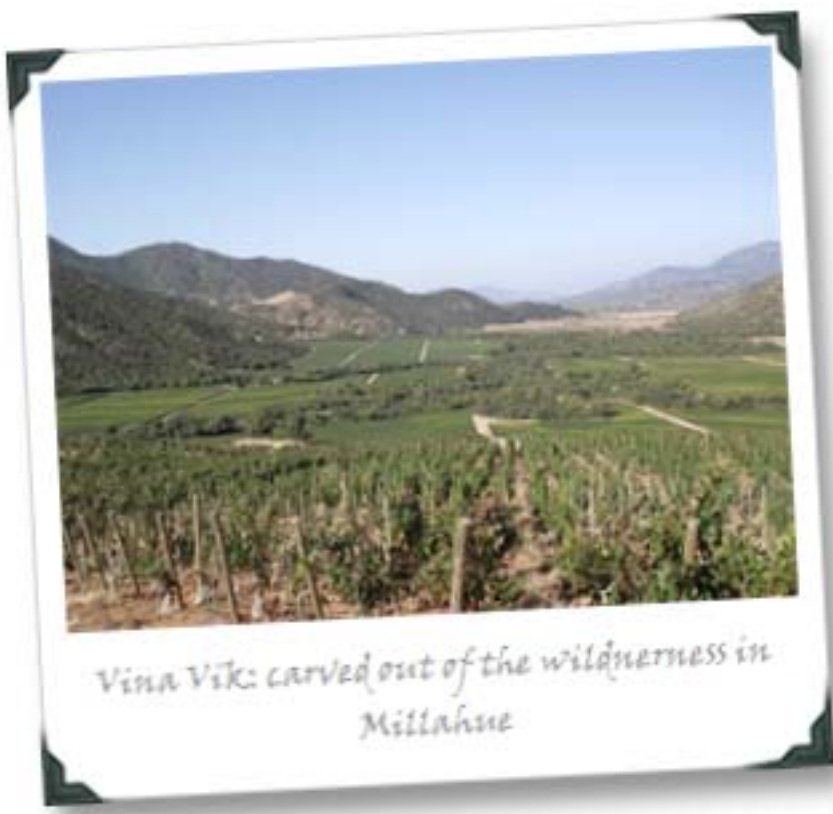


3 Grandma's Old Fashioned ...

Can Terroir Be Designed? (Behind The Scenes With Chile's Newest Ultra-Premium Red at Viña Vik)

Vinted on May 12, 2011 under elegant wines, on the road

"Of course, you know this word, *terroir*?"



Viña Vik: carved out of the wilderness in Millahue

The fact that Gonzague de Lambert, Marketing & Sales Manager of **Viña Vik**, didn't punch me squarely in the head after my response to his question – *especially* given our close proximity at the time, he in the driver's seat and I in the front passenger seat of a truck bouncing through the meticulously-kept vineyard property of one of Chile's newest winemaking outfits – is strong testament to his good-natured attitude:

"Sure," I said, "it's French for **Brett**."

Gonzague, formerly of **Château de Sales**, is very tall, very approachable, and (in mannerisms) very French (zee accent, zee pursing of zee lips when he speaks...). All the more reason why my joke actually playing out

successfully feels, in hindsight, like some minor miracle.

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On a warm, sunny, South American Summer day in early March, I visited **Viña Vik**, hosted by Gonzague and their equally affable winemaker Cristián Vallejo. On a day like that, with full view of their estate (and upscale guest house) in Millahue, one marvels at what's been achieved in their plantings, and in their lofty ambitions. A state-of-the-art winery is being built there in the hopes of making the best wine in Chile. As in, the best wine ever made in Chile. No pressure or anything, right guys?

Viña Vik is the brainchild of uber-rich Norwegian entrepreneur Alexander Vik, who, after researching potential S. American vineyard sites with extensive soil reporting, settled his winemaking sights on this stretch of land in Millahue ("Place of Gold" in the native indigenous language there) on the northern end of the Apalta Valley in Chile. Carving out a viable vineyard here, in the middle of nowhere (if you were dropped into this hilly, arid, windy spot blindfolded, you could be forgiven for thinking you'd landed in an eastern Africa game preserve) must have put a serious dent in Vik's fortunes. They wouldn't give me numbers, but did admit the cost to develop this land for viticulture fell somewhere in the ridiculously-expensive range.

The idea was to identify and develop a unique *terroir* in South America, and let the wine speak for itself. But can the expression of *terroir* be designed? Can it bend to the whims and resources of an almost-unlimited wallet?

In other words, did it work? I tasted their blending components made from the unique vineyard parcels in 2010 – along with their latest 2009 release – to find out...



The short answer is "sort of." The longer answer is quite a bit more... complicated.

The place itself, without a doubt, can grow some quality grapes – ample sunlight, temperature-moderating winds, and soils with plenty of minerals. No expense has been spared in the development, and the design for the new winery is impressive without being gaudy. But the site is, vinously-speaking, brand new (plantings started in 2006), and the vines are mostly under five years old – can we really be talking about *terroir* already?

Potential *terroir*, certainly. But delivering on that potential? I'm not sure all the money in the world can speed up a process of finding the perfect matches of place and grape that literally took hundreds of years in Europe.

And there is serious, developing potential, based on the 2010 component tasting that Gonzague, Cristián, Mike Dunne and I did in March:



Carmenere

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Talk



jan
Mon May 16 (3:17pm)

Hey Winemakers In Emerging Wine Regions: Stop Selling A Gazillion Varietal Wines Already!

I just love this blog and the intelligent wine conversations/debates that ens...



sam
Mon May 16 (2:13pm)

Hey Winemakers In Emerging Wine Regions: Stop Selling A Gazillion Varietal Wines Already!

In the current economy I would guess that bad wines don't sell. Winerie...



Jan
Mon May 16 (11:58am)

Hey Winemakers In Emerging Wine Regions: Stop Selling A Gazillion Varietal Wines Already!

Albarino is one of my new favs and I would LOVE to taste some LI ones and ev...



Jan
Mon May 16 (10:47am)

Hey Winemakers In Emerging Wine Regions: Stop Selling A Gazillion Varietal Wines Already!

I agree with this to an extent. I was a V&E major and studied in the Ping...



Colorado Wine Press
Mon May 16 (9:32am)

Hey Winemakers In Emerging Wine Regions: Stop Selling A Gazillion Varietal Wines Already!

We tasted through wines made from two different lots, and they couldn't have been more of a contrast. One, as purple as a midnight sky, had fruit that's as black as it comes, intense tannic structure, tons of tobacco and finish that was crazy long. The other was blue fruits all the way, more exotic but without half of the finish of the first. BUT... it had fantastic graphite notes (I'm a sucker for that).

Cabernet Sauvignon

Three different lots, but way more similarities than differences in the wines. All were fairly dark in terms of red and black fruits, with one being riper/more raisined, another rounder and more mouth-filling, and the last spicier and more structured. I was blending them for fun afterwards, because together I figured they'd make a kick-ass Cab. The main take-away from that experiment was that I totally suck at blending.

Cabernet Franc

Two lots, both of them tighter than drums. One was noticeably more jammy, the other more structured, neither had the spices, herbs and florals that love from cooler-climate CFs. Oh, well...

Merlot

Just one lot, and it makes a big, big, big boy wine. The body was almost a bit too much, and it's still showing a bit too much oak, but the chocolate, blue fruit and olive notes were downright awesome.

Syrah

Two lots, again very different animals. The first was silky-smooth, supple, soft, had a little hint of spice, a great balance of red and black fruits, and just felt like a killer, complete Syrah wine. The second was chalkier, "bluer," and tourniquet-tight, revealing very, very little about itself.

Overall, some of it was great, some very good, but none of it came anywhere close to sucking. I'm intrigued, and will be watching Viña Vik's development closely, because I'm curious how the 2010 will end up in terms of a final blend, and because (as you'll see below), the 2009 was certainly nothing to sneeze at...



2009 VIK Red Blend (Millahue)

Price: \$100

Rating: A-

Carmenere (63%), Cabernet Sauvignon (35%), Cabernet Franc (1.5%), Merlot & Syrah (0.5%)

There's soooo much going on here.

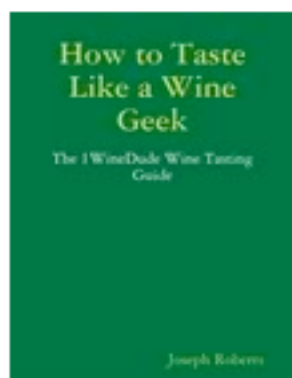
Spices, graphite, mixed olives, fig, black currant, plums, herbs... The wine is a bit deceptive, in that it's inky dark but the darker fruits and tannic grip don't hit you until the end when you're drinking it. And it's lively and vibrant, too, which keeps it from feeling jammy and gives some hint that it will age well and maintain the ability to play nicely



Already!

Joe - I've been through this argument with multiple wineries in the grea...

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that it will age well and maintain a the ability to play nicely in the food playground, provided you invite some roasted meat to that party. "Dusty tannins" is a phrase that's bordering on trite but if these tannins don't have a dusty character then I'm gonna eat my shoes.

The site is just too young, I think, to produce fruit complex and unique enough to marry "Chile-ness" or "Millahue-ness" into the mix for this wine. It's great drinking, no doubt – but it could (with the exception of a few hints of things to come, particularly in the ripe and expressive Carmenere that makes up over 60% of the bend) have come from almost anywhere. Almost.

So I'm not going to call it the best wine in Chile, and I'm not even going to call it a unique expression of *terroir* just yet. But I am going to call it one hell of an elegant, tasty, contemplation-worthy wine, and a fantastic start for a group with much more ambitious aims.

If I learned anything at Viña Vik, it's that you can accelerate the production of really, really good juice, but you can't speed up the development of soul – only the place itself can decide when it wants its spirit the to make the true transmogrification from land to wine, and like falling in love, it's never in any hurry.



Cheers!

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2. Risk Is The Business: Earthquakes, Amphorae and the Quest For Terroir at De Martino
3. Weekly Twitter Wine Mini Reviews Round-Up For March 12, 2011
4. Terroir At The Edge Of The World (In The Vineyards of Santorini)

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