

## Chilean surprise

Delicious and varied, Chile's wines are nothing short of bestsellers, says **Harshal Shah**



### From the cellar

**The only word to escape** my lips as I flew out of Santiago, Chile a few weeks ago was 'wow'. All my preconceptions about Chilean wine had been shattered in the time I spent visiting wineries (mostly in central Chile). Doubtless, though, the most exciting regions producing wine today in Chile are in the far north and remote south.

It will be a while before we see these wines in India. Unlike the majority of Chilean wine that comes from the large central valleys, wines produced at the extremities are of smaller quantities and from grapes that require more care in the vineyard and cellar. This tends to add a premium to their prices and unfortunately, the Indian market is not ready to pay up for these smart Chilean Rieslings, Pinot Noirs and Syrahs.

Another valuable lesson I learned was that one cannot afford to be a snob and write off a wine simply because it's produced by a large company. Most of Chile's wine industry is owned by corporations, based on an investment drive from the 1980s. So what? In most cases, the wineries run without interference from head offices. The winemakers are renowned and I was pleased to know that quality, not profit, is what drives them.



So, while we may pooh-poo the wines of Viña Tarapacá or Concha y Toro (one of the world's largest wine companies; it also owns Cono Sur), these guys produce some super stuff. Tarapacá's Black Label Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon is a wonderfully balanced, rich, fruity red wine and is one of Chile's top-selling premium wines. Indians might be familiar with Concha y Toro's entry-level Frontera brand, available locally, but their Don Melchor is spectacular — it regularly gets very high scores from the influential American wine critic, Robert Parker. The list is endless: Valdivieso, Casa Lapostolle, Torres, Montes — all big players with amazing wines.

Here are three memorable wines, but these aren't the only ones. It's worth spending that little bit more for Chilean wines.

### Viña Vik 2009

Coming from the Millahue region, this is one of Chile's best-kept secrets. Only one wine is produced — it's a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Syrah and Carmenère, overseen by legendary St Emilion winemaker Patrick Valette. Due to make its debut next year, it's being sold as a future for about \$150 a bottle. Great complexity, spicy flavours.

### **Cono Sur Reserva Gewürztraminer 2010**

From Casablanca Valley, this is a rich and intensely aromatic wine, with an elegant, fruity nose and strong flower notes, especially roses. It's sophisticated and creamy in the mouth. Sula wines' export arm will be bringing it to India so look out for them. Great value!

### **Viña Leyda Lot 21 Pinot Noir 2010**

Coming from Leyda Valley in north Chile, close to the coast, it has roses and fresh red berries on the nose with a hint of spice. Very fine, silky tannins with a potential to age for five to eight years.

- **Harshal Shah** is a sommelier and former executive committee member of the Australian Sommeliers Association. He currently spends his time between Sydney and New Delhi, consulting to restaurants and hotels. Follow him on [www.twitter.com/harshahshah](http://www.twitter.com/harshahshah)