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California Rhônes Riding High

PASO ROBLES SETS THE PACE
WITH BIG RED BLENDS

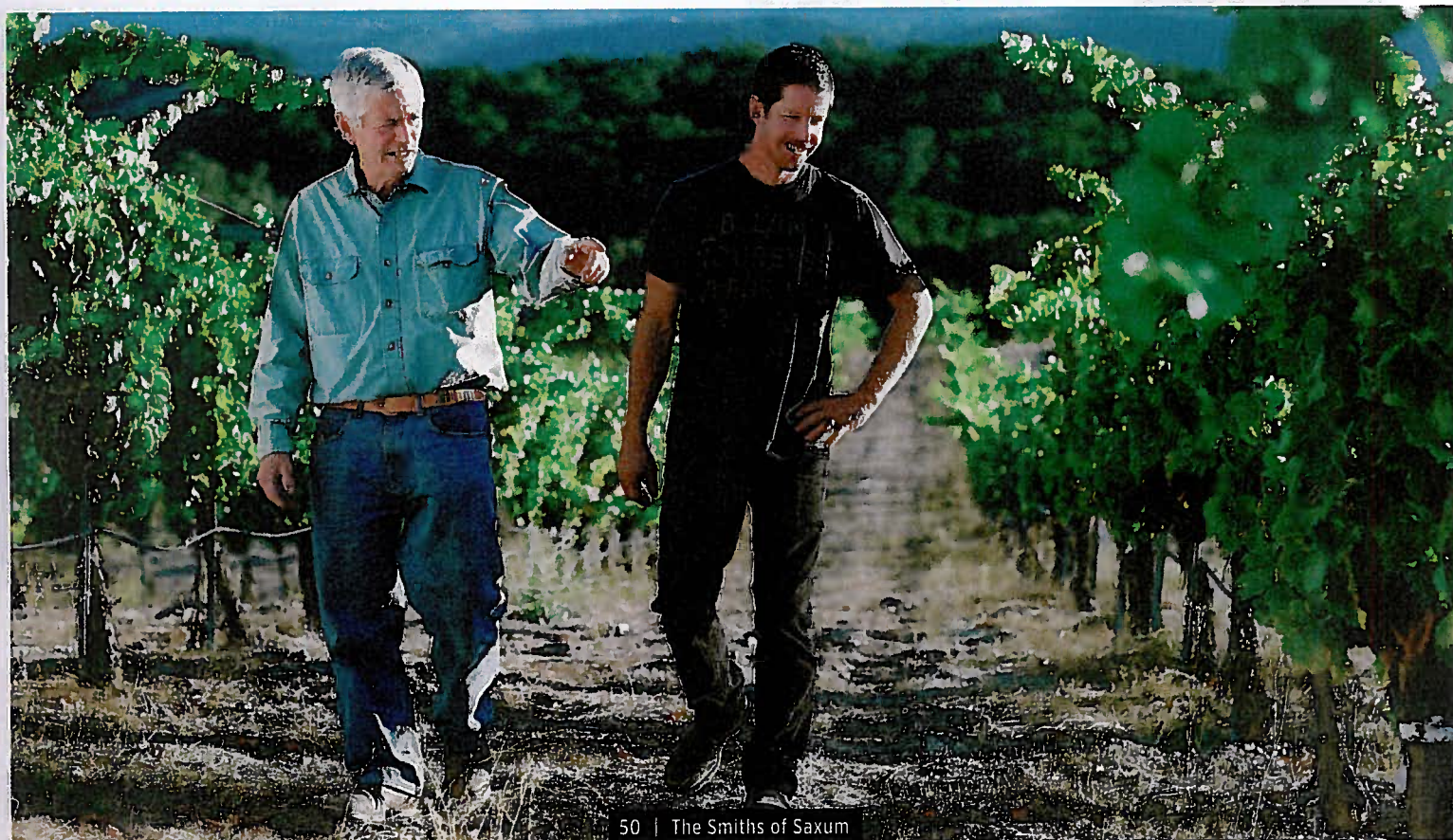
Chile's Value Hot Spot:
More Than 100 Wines
Rate 85+ for \$15 or Less

**BORDEAUX'S
POWER COUPLE**

**Comfort Foods
And Exotic Beers**



In the greater world, Paso Robles may never be more than a small dot on the map. But that doesn't matter much to those who make its wine. They know that they're on the brink of something great and are happy to play the role of underdog. —COVER STORY



50 | The Smiths of Saxum

COVER STORY

California's Exciting Rhône Reds Syrah- and Grenache-based wines rank among the Golden State's most exciting new releases. The inside story of the wines, and the rising generation of vintners who make them

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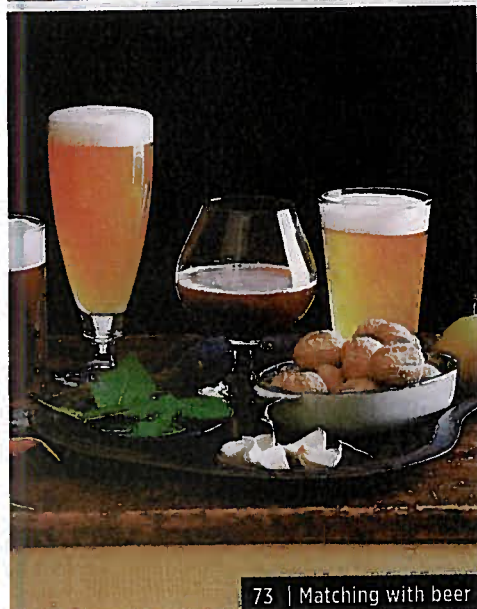
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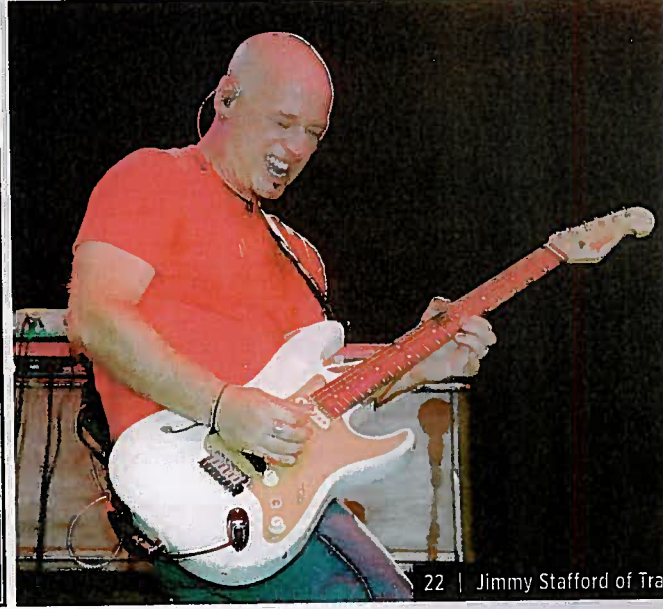
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“Port remains one of the world’s great wines. Port producers have many marketing challenges due to a complex web of traditions, but their loss is your gain. Port remains amazingly affordable.”

—KIM MARCUS, PAGE 44



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CHILE EXPANDS ITS RANGE

Emerging diversity propels quality offerings

BY JAMES MOLESWORTH



The broad, open Limarí Valley is home to Viña Maycas del Limarí, one of a handful of producers making outstanding wine in this cool-climate region.

While Chile's cross-Andean rival Argentina rides a Malbec wave to rapid success, Chile continues to move more methodically. With an expanding vineyard base and an increasing range of bottlings, Chile is banking on diversity for its long-term growth as a major wine-producing country.

"Chile's diversity may not have opened as many doors for us as Argentina's Malbec has for its industry. But long term I feel that Chile's diversity is our most powerful weapon," says Agustín Huneeus Jr., president of Veramonte, a Casablanca Valley-based winery known for its top value bottlings.

Veramonte is a textbook example of the burgeoning variety of Chilean wine. Though the backbone of its production has been

solid Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay bottlings, along with a Carmenère-based blend called Primus, the winery is proving adept at Pinot Noir as well—a grape many consumers might not associate with Chile.

To that end, Huneeus hired well-traveled consultant Paul Hobbs to work with in-house winemaker Cristián Aliaga on the winery's Pinots. The effort is paying off: The 2008 vintage yielded excellent values such as the Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Ritual (90 points, \$20) and Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Reserva (87, \$16).

Hobbs was one of the first winemakers to bring in outside plant material, importing a Calera Pinot Noir clone in 1994 while working as a consultant with Valdivieso. The clone was propagated by the winery and is now commonly called the Valdivieso clone in

Chile. Since then, however, not much else has been brought into the country en masse, as Chilean regulations on imported plant material are onerous.

“There is tremendous headroom for improvement in every area from vineyard to winery,” Hobbs says.

Since my last report on the country (“Chile Cools Off,” May 31, 2010), I have reviewed nearly 450 wines in blind tastings in our New York office. Of those wines, 48 earned outstanding ratings (90 points or higher on the *Wine Spectator* 100-point scale). Exports to the United States in 2010 were up slightly through October (for which the most current numbers are available) and looked likely to surpass the 7.3 million cases Chile sent here in 2009. (A free alphabetical list of scores and prices for all wines tasted is available at www.wine-spectator.com/033111.)

Leading the way this year are the Casa Lapostolle Clos Apalta Colchagua Valley 2007 (93, \$80) and the Concha y Toro Cabernet Sauvignon Puente Alto Don Melchor 2007 (93, \$80), the flagship bottlings from two of Chile’s most prominent wineries. But while these Carmenère- and Cabernet Sauvignon-based wines show the country’s historical strong suit, the rest of the top wines in this report show where Chile is headed.

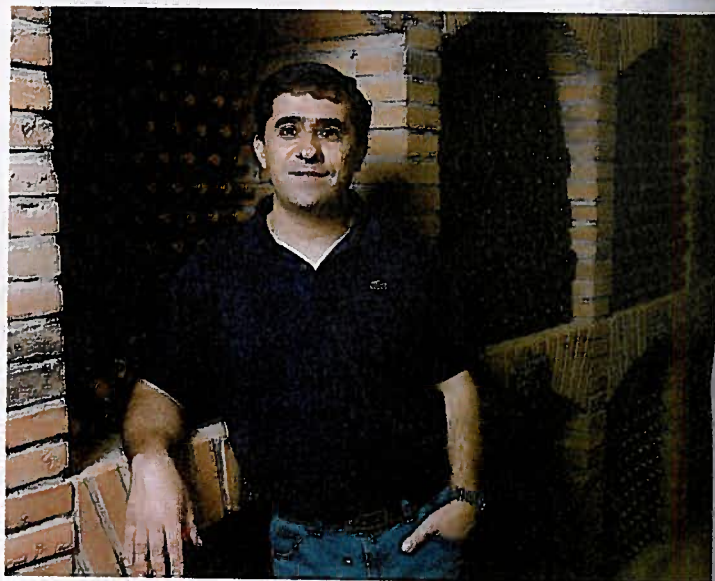
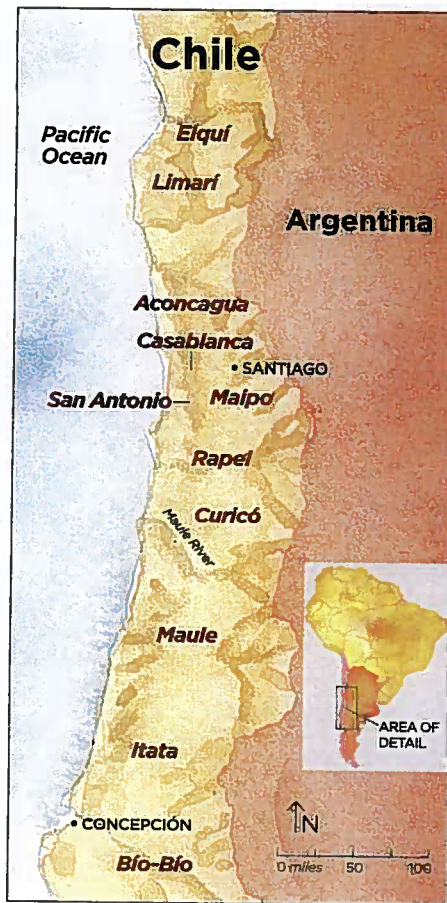
The Matetic Syrah San Antonio 2007 (92, \$86), produced from the cool, coastal Rosario subvalley, shows grippy focus, with anise, briar and graphite notes, while the Miguel Torres Conde de Superunda Curicó Valley 2005 (92, \$54) blends Tempranillo, Cabernet Sauvignon, Monastrell and Carmenère to produce a wine with a dense, racy core of linzer torte, crushed plum and boysenberry.

Other exciting wines that demonstrate Chile’s increasing diversity include the Viña Cono Sur Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Ocio 2008 (91, \$55), the Viña Maycas del Limarí Chardonnay Limarí Valley Quebrada Seca 2008 (91, \$40) and the De Martino Carignan Maule Valley Single Vineyard El León 2006 (90, \$30).

The range of newly developed areas—such as San Antonio, Limarí and Elquí—have netted some tantalizing results in the past few years, and the country’s top vintners see more promise down the road.

“I still would start in Colchagua Valley for most red wines,” says Aurelio Montes, owner and head winemaker at Viña Montes. “But if I were starting over I would choose Leyda for Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc and Limarí for Chardonnay.”

The Viña Montes Sauvignon Blanc Leyda Valley Leyda Vineyard 2010 (88, \$15) proves Montes’ point. Offering terrific value, this crackling version delivers a nice bracing feel along with its



Top: Winemaker Paula Cárdenas checks vines’ sugar content with a refractometer at top San Antonio estate Matetic. Above: Marcelo Retamal has been crafting excellent wines at De Martino since 1999, focusing on single-vineyard sites around Chile.

In all, there are 108 wines in this report that cost \$15 or less per bottle, while earning 85 points or higher. As a whole, this group of values covers all of Chile’s key grapes, both red and white—from the Viña Bisquertt Syrah Colchagua Valley La Joya Reserve 2008 (90, \$11) and Viña Tarapacá Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley Gran Reserva 2008 (90, \$15) to the Bodegas y Viñedos O. Fournier Sauvignon Blanc Maule Valley Urban 2009 (88, \$7) and Viña Casa Tamaya del Limarí Chardonnay Limarí Valley 2009 (87, \$13).

Other wineries producing excellent values include Anakena, Viña Caliterra, Luis Felipe Edwards, Viñedos Emiliana, Viña Errázuriz, Geo Wines, Viña Maipo, Los Maquis, Viña San Pedro, Viña Santa Ema and Sur Andino.

While value and diversity abound in Chile, you still need to choose carefully. As Chilean vintners expand their viticultural areas, vintage variations become more dramatic. The 2008 vintage, which currently dominates the marketplace, was marked by a late spring and very dry growing season that ended with sudden rains in April. That led to some reds marked by aggressive tannins.

“For me, 2008 is better than 2006,” says Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle, comparing it to a vintage generally considered outstanding in quality. “Lower yields enabled us to finish our harvest before

I rate the 2008 vintage 89 points overall, just shy of outstanding on account of its inconsistent nature. Success depended on when late-ripening Cabernet and Carmenère were harvested, and some producers chose not to bottle their top wines at all—Viña Montes, for example, did not produce its Folly or Alpha M bottlings—because quality was compromised by the breakdown in the weather at the end of the season. Montes chose to declassify the juice normally marked for its high-end offerings into the always-solid Alpha line, bolstering the winery's Syrah Colchagua Valley Alpha Apalta Vineyard 2008 (90, \$24) and Cabernet Sauvignon Colchagua Valley Alpha Apalta Vineyard 2008 (88, \$24).

Following 2008 is another inconsistent vintage, 2009, which was warmer than '08 and also very dry. Though this resulted in some chewy-style reds from inland valleys such as Maipo, Colchagua and Maule, the cooler coastal spots proved ideal buffers for the weather, giving consumers the perfect opportunity to explore Chile's new diverse range of offerings.

The Agrícola Llancauy Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Lomas del Valle 2009 (89, \$16), the Matetic Pinot Noir San Antonio Corralillo 2009 (89, \$28), the Kingston Family Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Alazan 2009 (88, \$30) and the Viñedos y Bodegas Córpora Pinot Noir Bío Bío Valley Agustinos Reserva Privada 2009 (87, \$13) are among the year's better Pinot Noir bottlings, showing solid varietal notes of black cherry, spice and mineral, with fresh, focused flavors. The grape is making strides in Chile, albeit small ones, as vintners pay increasing attention to it.

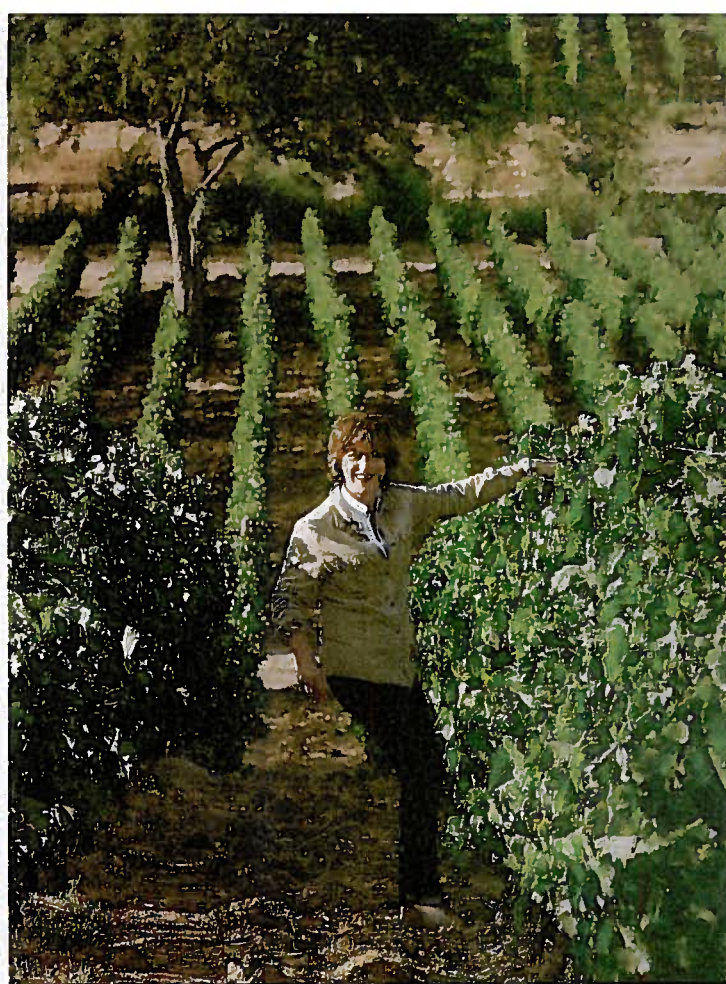
"No doubt market demand, particularly in the U.S., has piqued interest among the Chilean wine community to improve their game," Hobbs says. "Sites, however, have been far more complicated to sort out. And the country's main weakness—and one that may hold it back—is its very limited diversity of plant materials."

While Chile works on its Pinot Noir offerings, its whites are also dramatically improved, thanks primarily to an emphasis on better site selection. The Viña Garcés Silva Sauvignon Blanc Leyda Valley Amayna 2009 (90, \$20), the Viña Casa Marín Riesling San Antonio Valley Miramar Vineyard 2009 (88, \$34), the Concha y Toro Sauvignon Blanc Casablanca Valley Terrunyo 2009 (89, \$25) and the Viña Quintay Sauvignon Blanc Casablanca Valley 2009 (88, \$15) are all delicious wines that highlight the strength of the vintage, when cooler sites excelled.

Following the devastating earthquake in February of 2010 and then the emotionally draining rescue of trapped miners, Chile has proven to be a country with impressive resilience. Always export-minded, its wine industry seems just as determined to prove its mettle in the long term.

"They are 'can do' and not about to be denied," Hobbs says. "The country is ratcheting up quality in every segment of life."

Senior editor James Molesworth is Wine



Alexandra Marnier-Lapostolle of Casa Lapostolle tends to her Colchagua Valley vineyards, which have sourced some of the finest Chilean wines of the past decade.

Rating Chilean Red Wine Vintages

2010	88-91	A cool spring led to lower yields and delayed ripening for Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenère, while early-ripening varieties in coastal areas excelled, with lots of bright acidity and elegant fruit flavors	<i>NYR</i>
2009	88	Another warm, very dry growing season, though yields slightly higher than previous years; inland valleys more variable than cooler coastal spots. Whites are ripe and forward; tannin management key for reds	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2008	89	Long, very dry growing season resulted in reduced yields, but also greater concentration. Similar in style to 2003; achieving balance with sometimes rugged structures was key	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2007	92	Cooler temperatures through the growing season resulted in a late harvest and reduced yields. Reds show supple textures and excellent length	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2006	91	Very consistent through all valleys. Late-ripening Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenère excellent; less concentrated and structured than 2005	<i>Drink</i>
2005	93	Long, moderate growing season consistent through all valleys. Reds show lots of ripe, rich tannins; Cabernet Sauvignon excelled	<i>Drink or hold</i>
2004	88	Cool start to growing season with warm finish, then harvest split by rains: Carmenère suffered while Cabernet Sauvignon did well	<i>Drink</i>
2003	91	Cool start followed by a long season of warm days and cool nights; wines from all major valleys show power and structure	<i>Drink</i>
2002	88	Split vintage: North (Aconcagua, Casablanca and Maipo) produced excellent wines, while harvesttime rains in the South (Curicó and Maule) caused problems; Rapel caught in the middle	<i>Drink</i>

A score range indicates preliminary analysis based on barrel samples and/or a limited sampling; many wines of the vintage not yet reviewed.

Vintage ratings: 95-100, classic; 90-94, outstanding; 85-89, very good; 80-84, good; 75-79, mediocre; 50-74, not recommended. Drinkability: "NYR" means the vintage has not yet been released; "drink" means most of the wines of the vintage are ready to drink; "hold" means most of the ageworthy wines have yet to fully mature.

James Molesworth's Recommended Wines From Chile

Nearly 450 wines were reviewed for this report. A free alphabetical list is available at www.winespectator.com/033111. WineSpectator.com members can access complete reviews for all wines tasted using the online Wine Ratings search.

TOP WINES

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
CASA LAPOSTOLLE Clos Apalta Colchagua Valley 2007 Rich and enticing, with alluring aromas giving way to lush plum sauce, cassis and raspberry ganache flavors. Carmenère blend.	93	\$80
CONCHA Y TORO Cabernet Sauvignon Puente Alto Don Melchor 2007 Still a touch tight, but dense, focused and layered, with loam, blackberry, espresso, tobacco and sage notes.	93	\$80
CONCHA Y TORO Carmenère Peumo Carmín de Peumo 2007 Ripe, with juicy but focused blackberry, plum and black currant fruit, woven with vanilla, espresso and black licorice notes.	92	\$149
MATETIC Syrah San Antonio 2007 Big and ripe, but with lots of grippy focus, exhibiting a core of blackberry, black currant, plum sauce and fig paste character.	92	\$86
VIÑA SANTA EMA Catalina Peumo 2007 Dark and lush, but pure and driven, with gorgeous mouthfeel to the well-defined flavors. Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenère.	92	\$40
MIGUEL TORRES Conde de Superunda Curicó Valley 2005 Smoky and lightly firm, but with a racy, dense core of linzer torte, crushed plum and boysenberry preserve. Tempranillo blend.	92	\$54
BRAVADO WINES Faccundo Chile 2006 Muscular, with ample flavors of dark plum, macerated black currant, black licorice and loam. Cabernet Sauvignon blend.	91	\$20
CASA LAPOSTOLLE Syrah Requínoa Cuvée Alexandre Las Kuras Vineyard 2007 Dark and ripe, with mulled currant and fig fruit, but also a juicy, sanguine streak that helps to frame it.	91	\$24
CONCHA Y TORO Cabernet Sauvignon Pirque Terrunyo 2007 Dark, concentrated and racy, with red and black currant, plum and fig fruit, laced with tangy iron and tobacco notes.	91	\$38
CONCHA Y TORO Carmenère Peumo Terrunyo 2007 Sleek and polished, with a pure, racy core of raspberry, black cherry and black currant fruit. Very stylish.	91	\$38
CONCHA Y TORO Syrah Peumo Terrunyo 2007 Dense and ripe, but suave, with blackberry, black currant paste and fig notes. Shows impressive length and definition.	91	\$38
VIÑA CONO SUR Pinot Noir Casablanca Valley Ocio 2008 There's lacy-textured black cherry, currant and fig notes in this fresh, pure red, with black tea, iron and briar hints.	91	\$55
MATETIC Syrah San Antonio EQ 2008 Dense and well-layered, with plum skin, blackberry preserve and anise flavors, followed by briar, spice and graphite notes.	91	\$43
VIÑA MAYCAS DEL LIMARÍ Chardonnay Limarí Valley Quebrada Seca 2008 A fresh, unadorned style, with pure, racy Jonagold apple, Cavaillon melon and honeysuckle notes that drive through to the end.	91	\$40
VIÑA MONTES Purple Angel Colchagua Valley 2007 Broad and ripe, with layers of boysenberry, plum and fig fruit held together by tobacco, spice cake and smoked apple wood.	91	\$72
VIÑA MORANDÉ Carignan Loncomilla Valley Edición Limitada 2007 This has character, with a sappy, kirsch- and blackberry-filled core wrapped with pepper, licorice and tobacco notes.	91	\$22

TOP WINES (continued)

WINE	SCORE	PRICE
VIÑA SAN PEDRO Syrah Elquí Valley Kankana 2007 Dark but pure, with damson plum, fig, linzer torte and black currant fruit woven seamlessly, with iron, cocoa and violet notes.	91	\$44
AGRICOLA LA VIÑA Syrah Colchagua Valley Polkura 2008 Rock-solid, with tightly wound grip that holds a core of blackberry, fig, licorice snap and tobacco in reserve. Rich but sleek.	91	\$23
TOP VALUES		
WINE	SCORE	PRICE
VIÑA BISQUERTT Syrah Colchagua Valley La Joya Reserve 2008 Ripe and polished, with raspberry, blueberry and loganberry fruit.	90	\$11
VIÑA TARAPACÁ Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley Gran Reserva 2008 Old-school, but nicely rounded, delivering a pure beam of fruit.	90	\$15
LUIS FELIPE EDWARDS Cabernet Sauvignon Colchagua Valley Family Selection Gran Reserva 2008 Very solid, featuring ripe red currant and blackberry fruit.	89	\$15
VIÑA LA PANCORA Apaltagua Envero Colchagua Valley 2008 Offers a delicious core of fig, black currant and dark plum fruit.	89	\$15
VIÑA SANTA EMA Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley Reserve 2008 Well-built, with a solid core of crushed plum and blackberry fruit.	89	\$14
VIÑA CONO SUR Chardonnay Casablanca Valley 2008 A ripe, lively style, with the pear, fig and apple fruit bouncing along.	88	\$10
BODEGAS Y VIÑEDOS O. FOURNIER Sauvignon Blanc Maule Valley Urban 2009 Subtle but persistent, offering a core of white asparagus. Stays nervy.	88	\$7
GEO WINES Carmenère-Syrah Elquí Valley Chono Reserva 2009 Juicy and forward, offering friendly plum, blackberry and briar flavors.	88	\$15
VIÑA MONTES Cabernet Sauvignon-Carmenère Colchagua Valley Apalta Vineyard Limited Selection 2009 Quite ripe, with fig sauce, blackberry and boysenberry flavors.	88	\$15
VIÑA MONTES Sauvignon Blanc Leyda Valley Leyda Vineyard 2010 Very minerally, with flint and chive flavors and a bracing finish.	88	\$15
VIÑA LA PANCORA Cabernet Sauvignon Colchagua Valley Apaltagua Reserva 2009 Very solid, backed by a core of raspberry, red licorice and sweet spice.	88	\$11
VIÑA QUINTAY Sauvignon Blanc Casablanca Valley 2009 Fresh and bracing, featuring notes of sweet pea, mâche and lime.	88	\$15
VIÑA REQUINGUA Carmenère-Cabernet Sauvignon Curicó Valley Toro de Piedra Reserva 2008 A ripe red, with black cherry, currant, licorice and tobacco flavors.	88	\$13
VIÑA TARAPACÁ Carmenère Maipo Valley Gran Reserva 2008 An old-school version, with sage and mint notes. Very supple.	88	\$15
VERAMONTE Chardonnay Casablanca Valley Reserva 2008 Superfriendly, with lush Jonagold apple, melon, pear and butter notes.	88	\$11