



NEW WORLD CLASSICS WINE TASTING

September 2020



Offered in full and half bottles my guided tasting of allows an exploration of some of the most famous varieties that have driven the profile of major New World countries, and demonstrate a fabulous range of styles and quality levels.

Sauvignon Blanc Villa Montes – Aconcagua Region, Chile

Pinot Gris Villa Maria Seddon Single Vineyard – Marlborough, New Zealand

Riesling Dandelion Vineyards Enchanted Garden, Eden Valley, South Australia

Cabernet Sauvignon, Villa Montes – Colchagua Valley, Chile

Malbec, Amalaya – Valle Calchaqui, Salta, Argentina

Shiraz Dandelion Vineyards Lionheart of the Barossa – Barossa Valley, S Australia

Pinot Noir, Ata Rangi – Martinborough, New Zealand

Gewurztraminer Late Harvest, Montes Alpha – Curico Valley, Chile

Introduction

New World wine producing countries can broadly be described as those for whom winemaking became part of their culture as a result of colonisation by Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards. They include all of the Americas, South Africa and Australasia. It's probably best not to include China by the above criteria, but their wine making culture is very new – and luckily (in more ways than one), we aren't tasting any Chinese wines in this tasting. The UK doesn't fit either, wine was made in Roman times (archaeological remains have been found as far north as Lincolnshire), but its current wine industry is very new – and again, not included in this tasting!

The key thing that identifies New World wines is their freedom from the traditions and rules that govern the Old World. While the situation is blurring as young winemakers in Europe throw off the shackles of restrictive appellation rules, the New World is still way ahead – naming their wines in ways that consumers can understand more readily – generally grape variety, and focussing their grape growing and wine making on expressing those varieties' flavour, freshness and power. The over enthusiastic use of oak is largely a thing of the past, and as confidence has grown so has the interest among New World winemakers to introduce alternative grape varieties – some of which may be the answer to an existential threat from climate change – though sadly no grape variety has yet emerged that can withstand the fires raging through the west coast of the United States.

We have chosen to focus on the wines of just four countries for a couple of reasons: clearly these are great wines that demonstrate many of the characteristics we are keen to share about New World winemaking, and on a practical note, there are surprisingly few wines available in half bottles from other New World countries!!

Over the following pages we will explore Chile and Argentina and Australia and New Zealand, and the wines we are tasting.



Chile and Argentina

Vines were planted first in Chile and then in Argentina in the mid sixteenth century, and these 'Criolla' varieties (plus some Muscat) dominated wine making in both countries for the next few centuries. Argentinians still drink plenty of pale pink wine made from Criolla varieties, including Criolla Chica, which goes by the name País in Chile.

The modern wine industries took off following independence from Spain in the mid nineteenth century. Chile's vast mineral resources made fortunes for a few Chileños, some of whom invested them in wine estates where they planted more prestigious wine grape varieties – these proved an invaluable resource when phylloxera first appeared in Europe, and several European winemakers brought their skills and expertise to Chile at the end of the century. Argentina's wine industry has its roots in waves of European immigrants from Spain, Italy and France, bringing with them cuttings of their local grape varieties, including Malbec from Cahors.

Both countries invested early in viticultural research and with the benefit of almost limitless land, their wine production grew but along different lines. Argentina has a wine-drinking culture, reflecting immigration from southern European countries, whereas Chile's immigrants tended to be from further north bring more abstemious habits (or a preference for beer). Much of Chile's wine production is relatively recent, and a few companies dominate the industry, whereas Argentina's is more fragmented.

Both countries went through a dark period of political isolation in the second half of the twentieth century, with little investment and total reliance on domestic markets (which were starting to decline). With the advent of democracy came opportunity and Chilean producers in particular seized the moment – investing in planting, equipment and developing a reputation for pure, varietal wines. Argentina benefitted from foreign investment and the arrival of famous names such as Michel Rolland and Alberto Antonini, and a weak peso in the early 2000s benefitted exports. Argentina's rocky economy in recent years has inhibited investment, and Chile far outstrips it in terms of exports – over a billion bottles a year, compared to Argentina's 360,000, although Argentinian wine still realises higher prices than Chilean.

Geographically the two countries are very different, although both are significantly closer to the equator than most European vineyards. Chile is the narrowest and nearly the longest country in the world, and its wine regions spread from Elqui in the north (30° S), to Bio Bio in the South (38° S). The Pacific ocean creates a significant moderating influence on what would otherwise be the equivalent of the climate of southern Spain and northern Africa. Despite its narrowness, the biggest variations in climate and geography occur between the ocean and the

mountains rather than between north and south – maritime, cooler and wetter zones to the West, and mountainous dry zones to the East. To the south of Santiago where a coastal range of mountains creates protection from maritime influence, the wide flat 'Central Valley' is the source of bulk varietal wines grown on a massive scale.

In Argentina, wine growing starts a lot further north (at 25° S - pretty much the Tropic of Capricorn), beyond what is generally considered to be suitable for wine production). Here altitude is the moderating influence. Sunlight is very intense, but days are relatively short, and nights are cool, so vines can rest. The intense sunlight ensures high levels of phenols and wines from Salta (like the Malbec we are tasting) develop very strong aromatic characteristics as a result. Argentina's continental climate (short, hot summers followed by very cold winters) suits thick-skinned, perfumed varieties

such as Malbec, but further south (its most southerly vineyards in Patagonia are more than 40° S, equivalent to northern Spain) it is wetter and cooler and even Pinot Noir can flourish.

Amalaya translates as 'hope for a miracle' in the indigenous language of the now extinct tribe, the Calchaquí. The estate's vineyards are located in Cafayate in the very heart of the Calchaquí Valley, distinguished for being one of the highest wine regions in the world – over 1,800m with huge diurnal temperature fluctuations of around 20°C. We are tasting their **Malbec**.



Vines are drip irrigated using mountain run-off water that is stored in reservoirs because the average annual rainfall is only 150mm.

Rocky, poor and sandy soils force the roots of the vines to dig deep to find the vital nutrients and water they need, which results in fruit with hugely concentrated flavour.



2018 was a particularly dry vintage. Following a very cold winter through to October, temperatures increased well above average from February to April. The low rainfall reduced disease pressure, and good cloud cover prevented sunburn on the grapes. 25% of the wine was aged in second use French oak barrels for a period of 10 months prior to blending and bottling.



Montes was established in 1987, and continues to be 100% Chilean owned and run. Based in Colchagua in the Central Valley, its reputation is built on Montes Alpha (100% Cabernet Sauvignon) – one of the first super premium wines exported from Chile. It has continued to pioneer – planting Syrah in the Apalta Valley in the 1990s and now developing new wine growing sites as far south as Itata for its Outer Limits range.

The three Montes wines we are tasting are classic varietal expressions.

The **Sauvignon Blanc** is made from grapes grown in the Aconcagua region, north of Santiago. These are fermented in stainless steel and spend time on the lees, creating a high volume wine of very high quality.

The **Cabernet Sauvignon** grapes are grown in Colchagua. Time on the skins after fermentation, and eight months in French oak for 30% of the blend creates a lovely combination of fruit, acidity and tannin.

The **Late Harvest Gewurztraminer**, made from botrytis affected grapes from the Curicó Valley (to the south of Colchagua) which has a warm Mediterranean climate. Curicó was 'discovered' by Miguel Torres (of Penedés) in 1979, and is now one of the main producing areas. is just about the best value for money sweet wine you can buy - fabulous acidity, with complex aromas and flavours.

Australia and New Zealand

Grape vines arrived in Australia and New Zealand rather later than in the Americas. The first known vines were planted on the bank of the Swan River in Western Australia in the 1820s, but it was James Busby who established commercial wine growing in the 1830s, bringing cuttings from Europe and writing a manual for NSW wine growers, before becoming the Crown Resident in New Zealand, negotiating the Waitangi Treaty and recording the first wine making in 1840.

As with Chile and Argentina, the nature of immigration determined early development of the wine industry in each country. New Zealand's immigrants were mainly from the UK, bringing a preference for beer and whisky, and then a temperance movement that restricted alcohol sales until the 1980s.

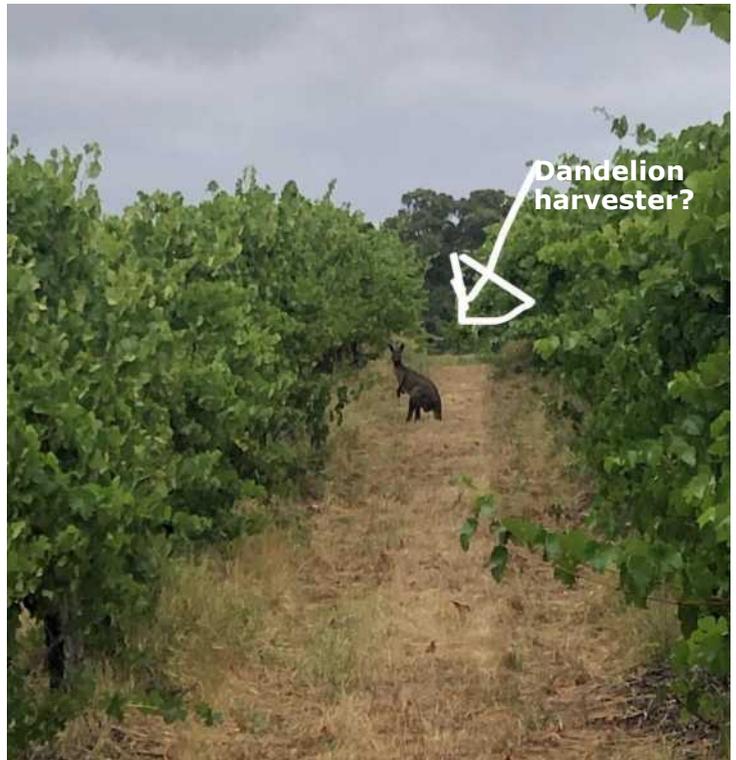
In 1855 Hunter Valley sparkling and still wines were exhibited at the famous Paris Exhibition (at which the Médoc and Sauternes classification was revealed), and Australia's export market was helped by the ravages of phylloxera in Europe, and the system of Imperial preference in Britain. Given its hot climate it is not surprising that for much of the first half of the twentieth century Australia's export focus was on fortified wines to compete with port and sherry, wines that were also popular at home.

However, waves of new immigrants from Europe after the second world war, and increasing 'cosmopolitanisation' of urban Australia, drove demand for dry, non-fortified wines, and from the 1950s many of the companies that dominate the Australian wine scene today began their rise to prominence, including Jacob's Creek, Lindemans, Hardy's and Penfolds.

Phylloxera has largely been restricted to Victoria, thanks to stringent quarantine regulations, and the large, arid spaces between vineyard areas. Although grafted rootstocks are used widely today (for the tolerance of salinity for example), Australia is still home to some of the oldest vines growing on their own roots in the world.

Australia's main wine growing regions are between 30° S (Hunter Valley) and 41° S (Tasmania). Most have climates moderated by proximity to oceans, but the large inland production areas ironically named Riverina, Murray Darling and Riverland are experiencing challenges as the sources of water for their irrigated vineyards are drying up.

Our Australian wines are both from South Australia, specifically the neighbouring Barossa and Eden Valleys. **Dandelion Vineyards** is a husband and wife partnership, who encourage dandelions to grow amid their vines in vineyards running in an arc from the Barossa through the Eden Valley, Adelaide Hills and McLaren Vale.



The 3ha **Enchanted Garden** vineyard was planted in 1910, just 50 years after the first **Riesling** was planted in Eden Valley. The variety thrives in the warm climate, and benefits from good water availability – a feature of the region. This is a complex wine with fabulous potential for ageing – despite its relatively low alcohol.

The Barossa Valley is a sheltered plain north east of Adelaide with a warm climate but cool nights – ensuring full bodied wines with good acidity. Irrigation is necessary in the summer. Our '**Lionheart**' **Shiraz** is named after Carl Lindner, a lifelong champion of old vines – specifically more than 100 years old in this case. Bush vines require hand harvesting, and whole bunches were gently crushed and fermented before 18 months maturation in new and previously used French oak barriques. This high quality wine was bottled without filtration or fining, requiring a lengthy process of settling.

New Zealand's climate is something of a departure from our other New World countries. Very much maritime, and very much cooler – Marlborough is a degree of latitude further south than Tasmania, though Central Otago at 44° S is still closer to the equator than Bordeaux!

Our two Kiwi wines come from Martinborough and Marlborough, on either side of the Cook Strait between the North and South Islands.

Villa Maria was created by (now Sir) George Fistonich in 1961, with an acre of vines in Auckland. The company remains privately owned, but has grown through sourcing grapes from independent growers. Its Marlborough winery was opened in 2000, a year later the company switched to 100% screw caps. It continues to make wine in Auckland, and also operates in Gisborne and Hawkes Bay.

While Sauvignon Blanc and Pinot Noir are its flagship varieties in Marlborough, the **Seddon Vineyard** in Awatere (to the south of the main Wairau region with a cooler climate) creates perfect conditions for rich, complex **Pinot Gris**. 20% was fermented in oak, and the wine spent 4 months on lees, with minimal fining/filtration. You might notice a touch of residual sugar on the palate.

From 3% of New Zealand's total vineyard area, Martinborough and neighbouring Gladstone and Masterton produce 1% of its wine – testament to the very high quality of what is produced. Yields are low as nights are cool and this is one of the windier parts of New Zealand. Pinot Noirs tend to be thick skinned and have characteristic red cherry fruit. Some vines are descended from a clone brought from the Domaine de la Romanée Conti in Burgundy. The three regions are known collectively as Wairarapa, (now Wellington Wine Country), and probably sell the majority of their wine through cellar door sales to weekenders from the capital. The annual wine festival was big back in the 1980s, though returning along the old road through the Rimutakas was definitely for a designated driver!

On Tim's 2014 New Zealand Tour we visited **Ata Rangi** and met Clive and Phyll Paton, who are Marlborough pioneers (Clive is an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit). Luckily they were typical Kiwis, down to earth, very entertaining and very generous with their time and information sharing.



Their Ata Rangi **Pinot Noir** includes fruit from vines descended from the aforementioned clone, grown in organically certified vineyards. 2016 was a particularly good vintage with a long warm summer. The wine was aged for 11 months in French oak (35% new) before bottling.

