

The Devil's Cellar



Michael Tabone

Spanning 6,200 hectares with an annual production of over 30 million bottles and 1,000 employees, it is the largest wine company in Chile and the fourth largest vineyard ownership in the world.

It is one of the 10 largest producers by volume, the third most powerful international wine brand and the first wine company ever to be listed on the stock exchange.

These are some of the statistics that distinguish Concha y Toro, and have made it to one of the most successful wine businesses in the world. And the company is set to become even more successful, with further purchases of vineyards and worldwide market penetration of its top brand Casillero del Diablo, according to Gabriel Salas, Concha's European trade manager, who was recently in Malta.

Mr Salas, a 'Sommelier' by profession, hosted two wine events, one at Maji in Gozo and another at The Arches in Mellicha.

Casillero del Diablo Reserva Privada 2005 is a blend of 65 per cent Cabernet Sauvignon from Pirque, which is one of the coolest parts of the Maipo Valley and 35 per cent Syrah from Peumo, another cool area in the Rapel valley further south.

This is the sort of wine that made Chile so successful with uncomplicated, easy to understand wines. It is clean and direct, lusciously fruity, with soft and sweet tannins, spicy, well integrated oak and a juicy, chocolate, minty aftertaste.

Don Melchor 2001, which is mostly Cabernet Sauvignon with a little Franc is grown on the alluvial soils of Puente Alto in one of the highest parts of the Maipo valley. It is clean and fresh, with a lot of black fruit. Alcoholic, but well balanced, it is very ripe – excellent work in the cellars.

I have been following Almaviva, which until recently was Concha's top wine, owned and produced in partnership with Baron Phillippe of Mouton and Bordeaux fame for some time.

It is also from Puente Alto and also Cabernet Sauvignon based but with 27 per cent Carmenere. This is a wine which is more European in style, more Bordeaux like. I have memorable notes of the 1999 and 2002 wines. At

The Arches we tasted the 2001 and it was complex, elegant and fine, with sweet spices, earthy and mineral notes. Maybe a bit closed at the moment.

Accompanying dinner was a fresh and lively Terrunyo Sauvignon Blanc 2005 from the Casablanca valley, nearer to the Pacific. We also had a fruity but powerful Marques de Casa Concha Merlot 2005 from the Rapel valley and a spicy, rich, in vogue, Carmenere from the Terrunyo range also from the Rapel valley.

To finish, we had a sweet, late harvest Sauvignon-based (some Riesling and Gewurz) wine. Quite exotic and fresh.

Although I am not very enthusiastic about your typical New World wines, I must admit that I like Chilean wines. I like the fact that although rich, they are not in your face.

If somewhat alcoholic, they are generally balanced. But in particular, I like the fact that the best have a sense of place. Over the years I have tasted most of Concha y Toro's range of wines.

The lower end ones are not very dependent on varietal characteristics, but I suppose they offer value for money. At the higher end there is a wealth of pleasurable, individual wines with great character.

The one that eludes me still is the extremely rare and sought after Carmin de Peumo. When some of it eventually make it past my lips I will duly report.



The wine haven of Chile.

Wines of the month

This was a busy month with lots of tastings. At a Super Tuscan evening the highlights were the majestic, but very young Sassicaia 01 and the wonderfully, expressive Tignanello '97, and in my opinion the fantastic Flaccanello 99. Great sense of place, not overdone, excellent food wine. I very much enjoyed a dinner of Cabernet Sauvignon based wines where the highlights were a young but impressive Leoville Barton '01 (St Julien) and a very earthy Calon Segur 01 (St Estephe).

At the trade tastings I enjoyed the new on the market Petaluma wines – in particular the Riesling 2006 (Clare Valley). Also from Australia we had the Terlato & Chapoutier Shiraz/Viognier 2006 (Victoria). This is a winery created by a joint venture between the US's Terlato and the Rhone's Chapoutier wineries.

But a wine that I would like to tell you about is Torres' new wine from Priorat called Salmos. The 100-hectare estate was acquired by the Torres family in 1996 but it took them 11 years to release their first wine with the 2005 vintage. I suppose this wine represents the transition from the fourth generation of Torres. Young Miguel was

described by his father as a marketing genius and his ideas were stretched to the full for the launch of Salmos.

For the first time, a wine has been linked to a mystery novel written by Javier Sierra and an eventual virtual game.

The wine itself is also quite avant-garde. Very concentrated but complex and playful. The first glass was restricted on the nose but with an expressive palate, quickly developing and changing. The nose eventually opened up offering aromas of orange, chocolate, black fruit jam and mineral notes. The palate is enormous – toasted coffee, dark chocolate, sweet spices and lots of ripe dark and red fruits, which at 14.5 per cent alcohol is quite balanced.

It went very well with grilled beef and garlic. Not your typical Priorat and not really a wine I normally love, but quite something.

Next time I will tell you about the tastings of Mouton Rothschild and St Emilion from Bordeaux, Batasiolo from Piemonte and a selection of Chateaufort du Pape. All happening in Malta within the next couple of weeks.

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