

# DIRECT PRESS

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## CHILE'S GNARLY OLD LEGACY

**U**nlike so many things these days,

wine is still tied to a place. In an era of remote work, metaverses, globalization, and homogeneity, wine helps us appreciate idiosyncrasies that can only happen in specific agricultural regions. A mix of topography, climate, culture, and communities shapes wines and imbues them with traits that are special to their place of origin. What were once considered quirks and flaws are now being celebrated by wine drinkers who are seeing wine as an agricultural product instead of a manufactured beverage. There is an appreciation of rough edges and preindustrial methods. Nowhere is this more true than in Chilean wine.

Like many others, I was first attracted to Chilean wine by \$9 bottles of Concha y Toro and Gato Negro Cabernet Sauvignon when I was young, broke, and, not working in wine. Those wines say a lot about Chile's colonial history exporting resources to fit global demand; they

say little about Chile's own culture and people. While many regions copy famous wine regions like Bordeaux and Burgundy, most of them aren't able to make marketable wine outside imitation. Chile is best-known for its imitations of Bordeaux-style wines, and yet it has the rare ability to make compelling wines that are unique to its borders. In fact, Chile — especially in the southern regions of Itata and Bío Bío — is home to some of the most singular and exciting wines in the world. There, the oldest vines in North America are producing wines that can be had for not much more than that \$9 bottle of Gato Negro. Why was it being kept a secret?

Well, *el gato* is out of the bag, now, mostly due to the País grape, aka Listan Prieto. It's a grape that thrives most famously in the Canary Islands and was brought by missionaries to Chile many centuries ago. The crazy thing is that there are still 200 — even 300 year-old — vines of País out there still yielding fruit. This is because the phylloxera louse that annihilated the rest of the world's stock of *vitis vinifera* grape vines in the late 1800s does not thrive in Chile. So they have raw material that simply

doesn't exist anywhere else. País translates to 'peasant wine' and was not regarded very highly until recently: more as the rough stuff your grandparent might make. There was also a style called 'Pipeño' that was often made with País grapes in *pipas*: skinny, pipe-shaped barrels made from Chilean redwood, or *Raulí*. Whatever the winemaker or his family didn't drink themselves could be easily carted in these *pipas* to the nearest town to sell. It was good for drinking on a hot day in the fields, not seen as much more.

Sometimes it takes an outsider to bring attention to what is taken for granted. When Louis-Antoine Luyt (*Press 4 mix*) came to Chile some 20 years ago from France, he was immediately drawn to País. According to Joshua Greene in a 2015 *Wine & Spirits* article, "Luyt had been a sommelier in France when he came to live in Chile. He told me how he had visited vineyards with some enology professors from Santiago and had been intrigued by the history of the [País] vines, but the academics told him they were garbage. So he took some bottles back to France, along with some respected Cabernets and Carmenères. He had done this tasting first with Chileans, and no one chose the País. When he did the same tasting with friends in France, they all chose the País."



Over the course of a few short years, Luyt proved that New York, Paris, and other cities were just as easily won-over as he was. Luyt originally did this with bottled wines under his own name, though they were mostly made by several different Chilean growers. Now he highlights the vignerons on each bottle, putting the attention back on the people who had been sticking it out over the years, and he has raised the price he pays these growers, giving them a lifeline to continue the hard work they have been humbly carrying out for many years.

All winemakers in this month's selections center their work on the premise that dry-farmed (more on this in a future *Direct Press*) ancient vineyards require very little stylizing to showcase their unique terroirs. There is also a new generation who have been inspired to work with these old vines in the old way and revitalize Chile's wine culture.

For us at the shop, we've seen these changes incrementally, but when we started to dig in and focus on Chile, we were energized by how much great wine we found. Though most of what we tasted was only a few grape varieties — mostly País for reds and Muscat for whites — there was a remarkable range of styles. We got schooled on just how exceptional the intersection of competence, prime material and vision is in Chile right now. All the wines we tasted spoke clearly of place and heritage;

## *“Chile is an industrial wine country, mainly.”*

Roberto Henriquez (below) is among the small contingent revitalizing the tradition of making so-called peasant wine from vines that can be 300 years-old.



different textures, weights, flavors, and aromas that were engrossing and reflective of different soils and climates. Itata, Bío Bío, and, to a lesser-degree Maule, are cutting-edge places to be making wine today, much like when natural wines from the Loire Valley, Jura, and Beaujolais were beginning to spark the collective interest.

Chase Granoff of Zev Rovine Selections has been representing the wines from this revival of Chilean traditions for almost a decade. He puts it like this:

"Here we had old, beautiful, gnarly vines being used to create a fresh, juicy, easy-drinking unfettered style of wine that was intended to be drunk freely." Yet we found not only easy-drinking bottles, but wines with poignant complexity that develop and evolve after opening like our favorite Burgundies. Chile can no longer be reduced to a split between industrial imitations of Bordeaux on one side and rustic, natty quaffers on the other.

As encouraging as these changes are, despite

possessing vine stock and history that is unmatched in North America and Europe, most of Chilean wine is still an industrial, technical product that ignores this (though even Concha y Toro now makes a wine called "The Original País"). According to winemaker Roberto Henriquez (*Press 4 mix, Press 2*), "As for small endeavors that push local peasant wine? Only a few of us currently have a good distribution network outside the country. In Chile, I would dare to say that you cannot live off these wines in local stores." At the moment, the

export market is the most lucrative path for a winemaker who wants to working outside of conventional wine.

Chile is a country where colonialism has shaped trade past and present. It's common for locals to eat industrial packaged foods while surrounded by lush produce cultivated for export only. It's why we wanted to highlight the importance of fair trade and mutual benefit in this month's selections. No longer limited to Luyt, growers like Roberto Henriquez' former assistant Paula Chodin Param (*Press 2*) have embraced the practice of helping growers transition towards organic agriculture and purchasing their grapes at fair prices. Simply by assisting long-time growers, accompanying them in the vineyards, and sharing their unique



perspectives, these folks contribute directly to their area's self-sustaining economy. I'd like to think we're motivated primarily by these noble ideals, but the let's be honest, our taste buds are leading the way. Of course, that there is something here for our heart and mind, too, is one of the great charms of wine. All of this is to say we're barely scratching the surface on the tremendous opportunities for Chileans. There is a lot to be hopeful for after many years of relegating Chile's unique

traditional wines to the margins — whether it's finding a way to connect with a unique patrimony of old vines or forging a new path that connects Chile to the wider world.

Salud!

*Jonathan Kemp and Bruno Sant'Anna*



Paula Chodin Param (pictured above and below) returned to her native Chile to work with Roberto Henriquez after training in Australia and California. She and her husband are making wines from centenarian vines in a friend's cellar — for now. *Photos courtesy of José Pastor Selections*

[Leonardo Erazo 'La Ruptura' Blanco 2019](#)

**Itata • Chile**

**[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]**

Leo Erazo does an incredible amount of research work on both sides of the Andes. He's the lead agronomist at an ambitious project in Mendoza, Argentina, but it's safe to say that his most impactful work is at home in the Itata Valley. After graduating from the University of Chile with a degree in Agronomy and Enology, Leo spent the best part of a decade working at various estates around the world doing research in soil science, geology and Biodynamics.

The parcel where “La Ruptura” grows is a special place. So much so, Leonardo and family made it their home. Some of the vines on the ground are 170 years old, on granitic bedrock and they have never been treated with pesticides in their existence.

Handling at the winery is kept to a minimum, with a light basket press and the juice seeing 2-3 hours of skin contact, lending the slightest tannic tension. The result is an energetic rendition of Muscat, salty, fresh and fragrant. Melon, passion fruit, lemon verbena. *Bruno Sant'Anna*

[Louis-Antoine Luyt 'Gorda Blanca' Cuvee](#)

[Benoit 2017](#)

**Bío Bío • Chile**

**[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]**

Louis-Antoine Luyt continues to be a huge international advocate for Chile's singular old-vine peasant wines. In Chile, he has also

continued to build relationships with the grape growers and farmers who have maintained local customs and traditions, including paying them increasingly higher rates for their fruit.

'Gorda Blanca' is a blend of Moscatel de Alexandria, Torontel, Corinto (aka Chasselas) and Cristalina (aka Semillon) from the village of Guarilhue in the Bío Bío region. The vines are from a 250 year-old single vineyard on granite and red clay that is ungrafted and not irrigated. You'd think that 12 days of skin contact, zero sulfur, and nearly four years in bottle would make this pretty freaky, but it's still plenty

refreshing and tasty. Slightly smoky lychee is met with stony texture and savory summer squash notes. Lower acid, but it's lifted up by a nice bite of citrus and orange juice on the finish. *Jonathan Kemp*



[Roberto Henríquez País](#)

[Verde 2020](#)

**Bío Bío • Chile**

**[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]**

Roberto Henríquez is yet another studious voice in this exciting movement in Chilean wine farming. A native of Concepción, he worked with winemakers in Canada and South Africa, but it was in the Loire Valley with René Mosse where the bug bit hard, and he gained a new perspective on winemaking and progressive organic and biodynamic farming. The minimalistic Pipeño methods of the original winemakers of Chile felt intuitive to the winemaking style he had adopted, and the rest of his story is pure progression in the pursuit of wines in a true Chilean context. His work is

focused in the Bio Bio Valley, with long term agreements with farmers tending some of the region's oldest vineyards.

'Pais Verde' comes from a unique, sandy parcel nearly at the shores of the Bio Bio river.

The wine is light in color, ethereal and beautifully high toned. A faint, Campari-like bitterness keeps it savory and dangerously refreshing. A personal fave. Serve with a light chill. *Bruno Sant'Anna*



**Villalobos Vinedo Silvestre 'Carignan' Reserve 2018**

**Colchagua Valley • Chile**

**[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]**

When we say a wine is wild we usually mean it's got a rustic feel. But this wine comes from Carignan allowed to grow as actual wild vines: like, 18 feet up in the trees, wild. This is what

grape vines do without humans wrangling them into neat rows, and it is so difficult and time consuming to pick grapes from vines that haven't been cultivated that I've never heard of anyone doing this before. I've heard of people with the resources and devotion to natural farming that wanted to do this but ended up throwing in the towel. Yet the Villalobos family have committed to this challenge, and it's quite a backstory. Natural wine doesn't really get much more natural than vines tangled in trees!!

The wine itself is also a kind of wild, with some star anise, tapenade, barnyard, and black cherry. Though rustic, it is reigned-in enough to present as a layered, complex wine with lots of charm. The ripe, brambly fruit is complemented with crunchy earth and spice. Definitely a wine to reach for when firing up the grill. Fermented in steel and aged 18 months in neutral French oak, minimal sulfur added.

*Jonathan Kemp*

**A Los Vinateros Bravos 'Volcanico' Pais 2021**

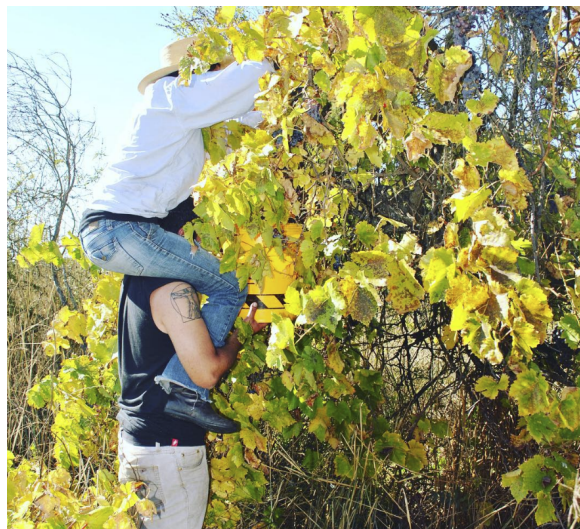
**Itata • Chile**

**[Press 4 Red]**

Leo Erazo highlights two predominant terroirs in the Itata Valley with the Pais grape as the medium - volcanic and granitic. 'Volcanico' País also comes from a very old and own-rooted parcel (over 100 years) grown on basaltic soils. Grapes are hand harvested and fermentation starts spontaneously with native yeasts in concrete vats. Skins are basket pressed and the wine is then aged in large casks made from the local *Raulí* redwood for 14 months. Light to medium bodied posture, with ripe and vibrant fruit (cassis/boysenberry), and shows its understated savory side with a smoky, peppery undertone. Tannins are fine but present, and in

a way, it's a wine that plays in the same key as something like Cabernet Franc from Chinon.

*Bruno Sant'Anna*



**Montsecano 'Refugio' Pinot Noir 2020**

**Casablanca Valley • Chile**

**[Press 4 Red]**

Pinot Noir from a small vineyard planted in 2006 by Julio Donoso and Andre Ostertag on a steep, four hectare plot. It's farmed Biodynamically and plowed with a horse; the wine is fermented in an egg-shaped, geothermal cellar in a combination of concrete egg and concrete tank. Smoky umami, raspberry, and a little reduction on the nose is matched with silky, elegant richness on the palate. Herbal overtones and a luxurious, lingering finish make this another impressive addition to the huge range of excellent wines coming out of Chile right now. *Jonathan Kemp*



**Gustavo Martinez 'Kilako' Moscatel 2019**

**Itata • Chile**

**[Press 4 White]**

Gustavo Martinez has been working closely with five families of growers in Itata and Bío Bío since 2015, all who work without chemical treatments and work the vineyards by hand or with animals. This dry, skin-fermented Moscatel comes from the coast of Itata, barely 11 miles from the Pacific Ocean at 1150 feet elevation. It really shows off a tangy, briny edge that speaks of its oceanic origin. Subtle white flower, lime, and sugar apple notes. One week of maceration on the skin adds some texture but I wouldn't call it a tannic, orange wine by any stretch, more refreshing like a good pilsener. Less than 30ppm total sulfur added, Gustavo moved to zero sulfur additions in 2020.

*Jonathan Kemp*



**Maturana Wines VOX Viognier Oxidativo 2018**

**Maule • Chile**

**[Press 4 White]**

Maturana is a family project led by José Ignacio Maturana. He was working as a winemaker and agronomist for bigger wineries until an

Above: The Villalobos family's Carignan vines grow up into trees, as they do without human intervention. The work of harvesting completely wild grape vines is not for the faint of heart. *Photos courtesy of Villalobos Wine*

earthquake destroyed his parents' home in 2010. As they started over from scratch, José shifted his efforts to build his family winery. This Viognier from the Pacific coast of Maule was quite a surprise. Barrel-aged and not topped-up, it is unlike any other Viognier I've tasted. Though the grape often makes lush wines with tropical notes, this version is more subtle and restrained. Leaner and earthier, it has a lot of enticing orange and lemon notes on the finish. There is a lot of complexity here with savory, saline elements. It should be a really interesting food pairing with seafood and would also be a great aperitif to savor on its own.

*Jonathan Kemp*

[Roberto Henriquez 'Super Estrella' Moscatel Magnum 1.5L 2020](#)

**Bío Bío • Chile**

**[Press 2]**

It is incredible these 200 year old Moscatel vines have survived on their own roots while the majority of vineyards worldwide have been replanted, either on the account of disease or replaced by more “in vogue” grape varieties. The history of wine in Chile is complicated, and in some ways, these old vines mirror the cultural resilience and tenacity of the Mapuche people along the Bío Bío river basin. For this wine, Roberto and his team ferment grapes in whole clusters using cement tanks, and the juice stays on the skins for the entire fermentation. The wine is an energetic and bright orange wine, with salted honeydew and green mango alongside a gunpowder tea-like richness. We're super stoked to feature this limited run in magnums.

Bring it to the next park / backyard / beach / cookout on your calendar and you'll leave with more friends than when you arrived.

*Bruno Sant'Anna*

[Chodin Param 'Parra Libre' País 2020](#)

**Itata • Chile**

**[Press 2]**

It's a small natural wine community in Chile, and Paula Chodin Param and her husband Arnaldo Batista worked with Roberto Henríquez before beginning their own project. They make wine in a small cellar belonging to a friend, and follow the same, minimal-intervention

approach as Roberto. All fermentations are with native yeasts, they use almost no temperature control, and sulfur is used sparingly and only at the end of malolactic fermentations.

'Parra Libre País' comes from a single parcel of dry-farmed centenarian vines at the base of a hill in the area of Coelemu in the Itata Valley. The soils

are granitic and the parcel is close to the Pacific Ocean, with its cooling influence bringing a lifting acid tension to the fruit. The grapes were harvested by hand and destemmed, then fermented in open-top plastic bins with their skins, then the wine is racked to rest in a stainless steel tank. Bottled without fining or filtering. This is País with depth and complexity — and as it's open to some air — it shows its wild strawberry, red currant, and hibiscus fragrance with fine texture and a Rooibos tea-like finish. It's a compelling wine, both refreshing and cerebral. *Bruno Sant'Anna*



Above: Roberto Henriquez pumping juice