

Chile

As fires raze Chile's ancient vines, Christelle Guibert reflects on past visits to the country and recommends 30 exciting wines that show its great diversity



AS I WRITE, Chile is going through its worst ever wildfire disaster – more than 400,000 hectares of land destroyed: forests, towns, century-old vines and people's lives.

I am extremely lucky to have visited the country on several occasions over the past eight years, but my last trip, in February 2016, was a real eye opener. Then, I discovered a new Chile that I didn't know existed.

A trip to Itata Valley, 400km south of Santiago, revealed the country's long history of wine production. Chile's first vineyards were planted there in 1554, and today the region boasts some of the world's oldest vines.

While Itata's vineyards are continually shrinking – mostly due to the economic reality of labour-intensive vine production versus the low retail prices of its wines – those vines that remain are as they were 500 years ago: ungrafted bush vines, organically dry-farmed and planted on steep granitic hills reminiscent of Beaujolais.

Itata's two neighbouring regions, Maule and Bio Bio, have their fair share of old vines too. And as a wine lover and vineyard owner myself, hearing that some producers have lost more than 20ha of 150-year-old Pais vines to wildfires is absolutely heartbreaking.



Valdívieso, Blanc de Blancs, Grande Cuvée NV 89

£9.99 The Fine Wine Co

This traditional-method Chardonnay has spent three years on its lees. Crisp nectarine and citrus aromas lead to a juicy fruit palate with a nice creamy texture from the lees ageing. It is an uncomplicated style, reflected in the price, but very quaffable. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 12%



De Martino, Muscat Viejas Tinajas, Itata Valley 2015 93

£17.49 Bedales Wines, Les Caves de Pyrene

Muscat but not as you know it! This bone-dry wine from very old, dry-farmed bush vines has spent 180 days on its skins in a 100-year-old clay amphora. Vibrant grape, subtle floral and honey notes. Full-bodied with a tannic grip and very refreshing. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13%



Casa Marin, Cipreses Vineyard Sauvignon Blanc, San Antonio 2015 92

£19.50 Alliance Wines, Sandhams Wine, The Drinkshop

This is bursting with gooseberries and spices. The crisp, fresh palate is concentrated and complex – pure enjoyment as an aperitif or with goats cheese. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Errázuriz, Single Vineyard Range Chardonnay, Aconcagua Costa 2014 91

£16.20 Bacchus, Hailsham Cellars, Kingsgate, Lindley Fine Wines, North & South, The Oxford Wine Co, Vivino

From 220ha of vineyards 12km from the ocean. Restrained, with subtle buttery and nutty richness and a floral and citrus core that keeps it fresh and focused. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Terroir Sonoro, Cerruco Moscatel, Itata Valley 2015 91

£14.65 The Fine Wine Co

A side project by Juan José Ledesma of Viña Inéditas. Sourced from 70- to 90-year-old bush vines, this is a thirst-quencher packed with flowers, peach and dried apricot. A touch of sweetness on the palate works well with the crisp acidity. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 13%



Casa Silva, Frutono Vineyard Sauvignon, Blanc, Lago Ranco, Patagonia 2016 90

£25 Jackson Nugent

From Chile's southernmost vineyard at Lake Ranco, planted in 2006. Zesty, ripe apple fruit and a herbal hint. It's a cool-climate style with elegant fruit concentration and exceptional length. Very stylish. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 12%



Clos des Fous, Locura 1, Terroir de Los Andes Chardonnay, Cachapoal Valley 2014 90

£18 Buon Vino, Selfridges, The Wine Reserve, Wholefoods

Flinty, citrusy aromas and sea breeze intensity. The palate shows richness and concentration with ripe fruit and spice and a refreshing lemony finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14%



Merino, Movi Chardonnay, Limarí Valley 2014 90

£12 Oddbins

This estate was set up by René Merino with José Pablo Martín making the wines. The result is a delicate white with citrus and crisp apple aromas. Very refreshing, zingy palate with subtle honey notes. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Pandolfi Price, Larkün Chardonnay, Itata Valley 2014 90

£13.50-£14.50 Berry Bros & Rudd, Stone Vine & Sun

This entry-level unoaked cuvée is elegant, crisp and zesty with floral and citrus perfume and a creamy and rich texture from malolactic fermentation. Superb value. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14.5%

'Having some of the world's oldest vines may be one of Chile's great strengths, although these modest producers don't shout about it'

Having some of the world's oldest vines may be one of Chile's great strengths, although these modest producers don't shout about it. Diversity is another boon: the country might have a reputation for its Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenere (see p74), but Chile's wine offering is far, far more than that.

The following 30 recommendations encompass 16 different grape varieties and myriad styles. Pais, which played an important role in the Chilean wine industry in the 16th century, is seeing a revival, and today is the source of fresh and easy-drinking reds. Malbec was introduced in about 1850 and produces a style that

couldn't be more different than that from neighbouring Argentina over the Andes: lighter and fresher with floral and earthy notes – the perfect crowd-pleaser. Other discoveries include skin-contact dry Muscat, Semillon, Cinsault, Carignan, Roussanne and Marsanne to name but a few. These discoveries may only represent a small percentage of Chile's wine production but, in my eyes, they are the source of real excitement – the new Chile.

Obviously, international grape varieties remain the core of the industry, and tasting the new vintages from tank samples during my last trip – especially Cabernet Sauvignon and Carmenere – revealed much fresher wines with less extraction, greater fruit and less oak.

With purer styles on the horizon, Chilean wine is at an exciting juncture. As you read this report, I hope the Chilean wildfires haven't inflicted more damage on one of the country's greatest assets, its rich viticultural heritage. Old vines are strong; let's hope they will come back to life.

Christelle Guibert is Decanter's international tastings director

These wines were the best of those tasted, non-blind, during trips to Chile, UK trade tastings or from samples requested from producers.

For full details of UK stockists, see p117



Alto los Romeros, Gran Reserva Roussanne-Marsanne, Colchagua Valley 2014 89

£9.95 Tanners

Predominantly Roussanne, this is ripe with exotic fruit and honey aromas. The palate is rich, but the Marsanne adds freshness plus herbal and jasmine perfume. An exciting find for less than £10. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Casa Lapostolle, Collection Grenache, San Javier, Maule Valley 2014 92

£21.99 Berkmann

Don't let the rich, powerful nose fool you – this has elegance and finesse with purity of black berries and spice, firm tannins and beautiful depth. So classy! Only 324 bottles made, so buy before it is too late. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 15%



Cono Sur, Silencio, Maipo Valley 2011 92

£80 The Wine Society

Super-ripe, packed with cassis, dark berry fruits and spicy oak, but enough acidity, grainy tannins and minerality to keep all this in check. Leafy notes on the finish add elegance. Still very young and will benefit from cellaring. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



De Martino, Viejas Tinajas Cinsault, Itata Valley 2015 92

£15.99 Les Caves de Pyrene

Made in clay jars (tinajas), this is a graceful, old-vine Cinsault showing strawberry, raspberry and floral scents. Light bodied but very harmonious with great depth of delicate red fruit and leafy intensity on the finish. This is a must-try. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13%



Santa Rita, Bougainville Petite Sirah, Maipo Valley 2010 92

£36.99-£49.99 All About Wine, Amazon UK

A relatively unknown grape in Chile, also known as Durif in other parts of the world. Here it offers spicy plum and cassis with a hint of liquorice and a leafy edge, plus bright acidity and polished tannins. Worth seeking out. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14.4%



Viña Ventisquero, Tara Red 1, Atacama Desert 2015 92

£39.10 (2013) The Wine Treasury

This 100% Pinot Noir, fermented with 15% whole cluster berries, has lots of personality already. The spiced cherry and strawberry fruit is pure and dense, backed up by a pristine acidity and good depth on the finish. Less than 1,500 bottles made. **Drink** 2020-2030 **Alc** 13%



Viu Manent, Gran Reserva Malbec, Colchagua Valley 2014 92

£20 Amps, La Zouch, Stone Wines, Wine Chambers

This French variety was first planted in Chile before it made to Argentina. It's more delicate here, showing gentle aromas and more intense flavours of cherry and violet. Fresh with subtle oak. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14%



Errázuriz, Single Vineyard Syrah, Aconcagua Costa 2014 91

£16.30 Aske, Edencroft, Hailsham Cellars, Islington Wine, The Oxford Wine Co, Whalley Wine Shop, Vivino

Austere Syrah with dominant floral aromas, redcurrant and pepper. The palate is juicy with bright red cherry fruit backed by vivid acidity and a herbal finish. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 13%



Garcés Silva Family Vineyards, Boya Syrah, Leyda Valley 2014 91

£10.50 The General Wine Co

This family made its name with the Amayna Pinot Noir but later introduced fruit-driven wines under the Boya label. Blackberry and blueberry fruit and a hint of spice. Juicy, fresh and quaffable. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13% ➤



Huaso de Sauzal, El Viejo Almacén de Sauzal, Maule 2014 91

£21 Great Western Wine

Funky and natural (in a positive way), made from the local grape País. It's a likeable red with juicy cherry fruit, fresh acidity and a spicy finish that gives real individuality. The tannins are a bit raw, but there's plenty of pretty fruit to balance. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Pedro Parra y Familia, Pencopolitano, Cauquenes, Itata 2014 91

£19.50 Bottle Apostle, H2Vin

From terroir guru Pedro Parra comes this juicy, delicate blend of Malbec, Syrah, Carmenere and a dash of Carignan, Cinsault and País. Chewy cherry and cassis on a smooth, weighty palate with a fine, mineral finish. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14%



Santa Rita, Casa Real Cabernet Sauvignon, Maipo Valley 2012 91

£35-£39.95 Harrods, Waitrose

This wine is a Chilean icon and one of the world's best 100% single-vineyard Cabernet Sauvignons. Trademark ripe cassis and black berry fruit plus cedar wood spice from the oak. It is powerful and robust yet stylish, with an amazing capacity to age. **Drink** 2020-2035 **Alc** 14.5%



Viu Manent, Vibo Viñedo Centenario, Colchagua Valley 2012 91

£16 Oddbins

From vineyards planted more than 100 years ago. Cabernet Sauvignon and Malbec with a dash of Petit Verdot. Pungent yet elegant flavours of red and black fruit and spice. The oak is extremely well integrated with great depth on the finish. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14%



Concha y Toro, Marqués de Casa Concha Syrah, Rapel Valley 2014 90

£12 Booths

Consistently one of Chile's most reliable wines and a great bargain of the New World. Typical Syrah characters with big, bold plum, blackberry and meaty flavours nicely cut through by the acidity which gives a refreshing finish. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 14.5%



Matetic Vineyards, EQ Pinot Noir, Casablanca Valley 2013 90

£20 Oddbins

The grapes that make up this cuvée have always been farmed biodynamically, and their Pacific Coast location means they benefit from constant breezes but also soils rich in decomposed granite. Dense cherry flavours, a complex structure and smooth tannins. Elegant mineral finish. **Drink** 2017-2022 **Alc** 14%



Montes, Outer Limits Old Roots Cinsault, Itata Valley 2015 90

£16.99 Liberty Wines

Deliciously inviting nose of sweet red cherry and pepper. It's uplifting and fresh with plenty of juicy fruit, nice grippy tannins and spice on the finish. While it is very quaffable, it has personality and depth too. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 14%



Pérez Cruz, Limited Edition Cot, Maipo Andes 2014 90

£16.49 Hailsham Wine Cellars, Harperwells, Kevin O'Rourke, Noel Young, Strictly Wine

This wine is more akin to a French Malbec than the Argentinian style, hence the decision to label it Cot. Elegant spice and black berry fruit and the oak is well-judged with hint of cedar wood and firm tannins. A stylish wine at a bargain price. **Drink** 2017-2020 **Alc** 13.5%



Pérez Cruz, Limited Edition Syrah, Maipo Valley 2014 90

£16.49 Great Wines Direct, Harperwells, Haywood Wines, The Good Wine Shop

Pérez Cruz has built a reputation for reliable, great-value wines and this is no exception. It has a northern Rhône air with peppery and smoky characters backed by luscious blueberry and black cherry. Full-bodied, yet pure and elegant. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14%



Viña Ventisquero, Kalfu Sumpai Syrah, Leyda Valley 2014 90

£18.99 AC Gallie, Adnams, Love Wine, Quaff, The Wine Cellar, The Wine Reserve

Ample plum, cassis and black cherry on the nose and palate with smoky bacon oak intensity and a leafiness on the finish. Fresh and lively acidity and ripe tannins keep the wine vibrant and approachable. Drinking well now. **Drink** 2017-2019 **Alc** 13.5%



Koyle, Royale Carmenere, Colchagua Valley 2013 89

£20 Berry Bros & Rudd

Based in the foothill of the Andes, this 1,100ha estate, of which 80ha are under vine, is farmed biodynamically. This Carmenere has a lifted nose of violet and mint backed by black fruit and spice. Velvety texture with a tight structure which will benefit from decanting. **Drink** 2018-2025 **Alc** 14.5%



Valdivieso, Caballo Loco, Grand Cru Sagrada Familia, Curicó Valley 2013 89

£24 Brooksby, Buy Great Wine, Fine Wine & Spirits, GP

Brands, Henderson Wines, Magnum Wine, Richardson's, The Bishop's Cave, The Fine Wine Co, Wine Rack Cabernet Sauvignon, Carmenere and Malbec. Black and red fruit, herbal intensity and lots of oak spice. Bold yet elegant, with rich fruit and a smooth texture. **Drink** 2017-2025 **Alc** 14%