

Chile | 2005

REGIONS

CURICÓ & MAULE

Both Curicó and Maule are regions that tend to get a raw deal. Between them, they account for more than 40% of Chile's vineyard, and it is here that many of Chile's large-volume brands, often of excellent quality, are sourced. But in terms of recognition, their stock is low.

Both regions are slighted for such crimes as having overly high yields, a parochial mentality, ill-conceived plantings including poor vine material (such as Sauvignonasse instead of Sauvignon Blanc), as well as a lack of truly progressive producers to put the regions on the map.

Many of these accusations are well founded. Nonetheless, the situation is changing. Producers are starting to capitalise on the fresher, more classic styles of wine that the regions can produce and are beginning to express certain pockets of quality.

Established producers like Torres, San Pedro and Valdivieso have long been championing Curicó's potential as a producer of classic style reds and whites, often easy going, but some more complex like Torres' Manso de Velasco old-vine Cabernet – 'an authentic expression of the vineyard,' according to winemaker Fernando Almeda.

In Maule, definite progress is being made. The region is sufficiently far south for late-season rains to be a worry, and in the past the wines tended to be somewhat light in weight. However, a general improvement in viticultural techniques and a newfound confidence among winemakers could herald a more prominent role for Maule in the future as the wines become more concentrated, elegant and expressive. Promising areas include San Clemente and certain sites in Loncomilla.

As Carta Vieja winemaker Rodrigo Navarrete summarises, 'Before, we planted any variety in any soil. Now we pay attention. That's our aim today: matching varieties to climate and soil for the best results.' Top producers include Gillmore, Caliboro/Erasmio, Casa Donoso, Calina and Botalcura.

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