



Wine Club Tasting Notes

November 2007

A little bit of Chilean Wine History and Winery Info

Since you are receiving three bottles of wine this month, I figured for the sake of brevity that I would condense the pertinent information into two pages instead of four. (Who has time to read all that, anyway?) We're headed back down to Chile with this month's selections, so for those of you new to the wine club or those of you who need a 'brusher up', I wanted to include a little about Chile's wine history. Typically, I focus more on details about the region or the juice in the bottle rather than the actual winery, but the winery represented this month is pretty unusual, so I felt a little more information on the wine facility itself would be of interest. But let's start with first things first – history.

Winemaking in Chile began with the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors. Missionaries introduced grapevines to Chile during the middle of the 16th century to supply wine for religious ceremonies. During the next hundred years the cultivation of grapevines and the production of wine continued from the area of modern day Santiago southward to and beyond the Bio Bio River. Wine production flourished over the years, and by the late 18th century, wine exports increased dramatically, competing with European wines on the international market. BUT, Chile didn't start planting classic European vine varieties until the mid 19th century. In the mid-1800s, Chileans became obsessed with anything French – French architecture, French couture, French cuisine and French wine. It became fashionable for anyone who was anybody with lots of money to purchase land expressly for growing wine grapes and import a French enologist (that's winemaker to you and me) to make the wine. This is how Chile's vineyards became planted with grapes such as Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay, etc. But it wasn't all roses for this blossoming industry, however. The Chilean wine industry began a decline that started with the onset of WWII and lasted until the return of democracy in 1990. Chile's wine revival would rival any tent revival this side of Pelion! But one important fact Chile shares with the rest of the winemaking world in regards to establishing ownership of winery is this – if you want to make a small fortune in this business, start with a large one.

Many people who wind up in the wine growing/making business had a former life which made them boatloads of money. The owner of Haras de Pirque is no exception. In 1991, after a highly successful business career in Chile's private sector, entrepreneur Eduardo Matte acquired an estate that he would later name Haras de Pirque, in the southwestern part of Pirque, a prestigious winegrowing area situated in the Maipo Valley. Eduardo Matte's objectives included launching a major winery project, and expanding and improving the existing thoroughbred farm. (Yes, thoroughbred farm!) The Haras de Pirque estate covers 1,500 acres on the lower slopes of the Andes Mountains, 362.5 acres of which are planted vineyards. In addition, Haras de Pirque is the only facility in Chile where thoroughbreds are bred, raised and trained. Not only that, this state-of-the-art winery is built in the shape of a horseshoe in honor of the thoroughbred farm. It is the only horseshoe-shaped winery in the world, built into the side of the Andes. The inner sloping floors of the winery built on the side of a hill allow the force of gravity to gently, slowly

move the musts and wine, eliminating the need for pumps and other kinds of transfer systems and substantially reducing the potential for oxidation. Winemaker Alvaro Espinoza trained in Chile and, in keeping with Chilean tradition, France. He holds a degree in oenology from Bordeaux and prior to working for Haras de Pirque, he worked on the winemaking teams at both Château Margaux and Moët & Chandon. With these credentials, all I can say about facility, winemaker and resulting wines is 'Nuff said.