



Written by
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Mainly Itata



As Richard wrote recently in [Chile runs wild](#) and I outlined a couple of years ago in [The new Chile](#), many of the most innovative and exciting Chilean wines are currently being grown in the south - particularly the Maule region and the Itata Valley in Bío-Bío - yet they are the ones worst affected by the recent fires.

It was terribly sad to see the fire damage in southern Chile recently. Some vineyards were still green but many were completely burnt, as of course were buildings and livestock, as described by Derek Mossman Knapp [From the frontline of Chile's fires](#). If you look carefully below, you can see how a green vineyard is surrounded by the dull grey-brown of burnt pine plantations, suggesting that in some cases the vineyards may have acted as much-needed firebreaks.



García + Schwaderer is one of the more dynamic labels concentrating on fruit from the wild south of Chile, and the dry-farmed Piedra Lisa vineyard in Itata on which they have so far depended for Mourvèdre was destroyed. Its owner Magdalena Mendoza wrote to me thus:

'We (my family) own this farm since the early 1990s. It was already planted with old Mission (País) vines. In 2010 we started grafting some of them to Carignan, Grenache, Petit Verdot, Mourvèdre and Petite Sirah, resulting in very interesting wines, made by Felipe García.

'Unfortunately the big fire of late January arrived to Piedra Lisa with no shyness. Pine forest, native forest, pasture fields, some buildings and also an important part of the vineyard was burnt. This is the moment when you ask yourself so many things, when you see your illusions, efforts and projects standing nowhere, until you realise that your memories and the love for that place are more important so it can give you the energy to move forward.

'And here we are, with all the power to work on the rebuilding and to try to save the vineyard so we can enjoy our place as we have always done! For us, Piedra Lisa is the place where the family and friends get together and it has a special meaning for each of my brothers, parents and even my nephews. Felipe is also very involved with this place as a very close friend and as the one who makes our dream come true... to taste Piedra Lisa in a glass of wine.'

Of the bigger companies, Torres was an early champion of the special qualities of southern Chilean vineyards. Son of Miguel A Torres, Miguel Torres Maczassek, who for so long was in charge of the Chilean branch of this family-owned company, also volunteered these comments when replying to another, unrelated query:

'You probably know about the fires that we recently had in Chile. It has been terrible; many vinegrowers are affected. The perimeter of many vineyards has burned and the smoke could have an effect on some wines in this vintage. More than ever it will be important to choose the right grapes and make separate vinifications. We were hit in our vineyards of Empedrado and Huerta Maule regions.

'There will be work to do rebuilding houses in the countryside. We will pay for grapes from our usual suppliers of País even if they have been affected by the fires and we cannot use them. In many cases it is the only income they get.

'Chile is a beautiful country but somehow it seems that every five years Nature likes to show us all her power with earthquakes, volcanoes, fires...'

But this part of the country seems to have so much to offer, even if vineyard holdings are typically very small, in the hands of smallholder mixed farmers who are seriously under-rewarded by the big companies that are now starting to buy fruit here. Dry-farmed mixed plantings of bushvines are the order of the day - useful in a country where water supplies are

slowly drying up – and they seem to have achieved enviable balance to judge from the number of extremely healthy-looking vines that are 100 years old or more.

Chile's first vines may have been planted well to the north of Santiago but the country's first serious stab at consistent viticulture was in the hinterland of Concepción, the port at the mouth of the Bío-Bío River, helped by the fact that it was here that the French established themselves in the 18th century.

Rainfall in the Itata Valley is 700-800 mm (28-31 in) a year, quite enough for vines to flourish without irrigation. Vine diseases are rare, and the farmers couldn't afford sprays anyway. Cloudy summers usefully slow ripening and, with the exception of the tinderbox 2016-17 summer, temperatures are generally moderate, cooled by afternoon breezes off the Pacific. Soils on these undulating hills are iron-rich and red over a promising mix of granite, schist and basalt with some clay and limestone.

Pandolfi Price Chardonnay, for instance, is grown in Itata on an unusually extensive estate complete with vineyard manager and vertical shoot positioning, and the wines keep the most admirable tension thanks to the wind and the basalt beneath. From February onwards temperatures generally fall considerably. These are remarkably tense wines considering their latitude, kept so presumably by the regular afternoon breezes off the Pacific. The 2015 Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2015 has still not completed its malolactic fermentation, for instance,

Most vineyards in Itata are within 30 km of the coast but in theory there are more, if hotter, sites further inland that could be planted. For the moment, natural alcohol levels are between 12.5 and 14.5%. One brake on development, apart from the injudiciously ubiquitous plantations of imported pine and eucalyptus, is how difficult it is to find one's way around Itata. The village of Guarilhue about 40 minutes inland from Concepción, and cited specifically on some of De Martino's labels, is popular with incoming purchasers of grapes partly because it is well exposed, and has a few bigger plots of vines, but also because it is relatively well signposted.

Thanks to a 400-year-old tradition of viticulture, smallholders here are very good at growing vines but, as Pedro Parra whose job is to scout vineyard land says, 'the trickiest part is to get close to these small farmers. They are very suspicious of anyone from outside, and they certainly don't want to sell their land.' He is seen on the left above with winemaker François Massoc flanking their Guarilhue grape grower Juan Carlos Torres.

A typical Itata vineyard consists of a field blend of Muscat of Alexandria, Cinsault and the more upright País. País, whose yields can vary from one to 20 kilos a vine, needs a low-vigour site to deliver quality. Although there is no shortage of ancient País bushvines, Leo Erazo, the talented Chilean winemaker at Altos Las Hormigas in Mendoza, is actually planting this ancient and oft-scorned variety on a particularly cool tract of schist near the coast for his geologically named Viñateros Bravas range pictured below in Tomé, a Bío-Bío beach resort hit by the 2010 tsunami where we had lunch one day. (He also makes some particularly fine wine under the Rogue Vine label.)



Some spots are warm enough for Grenache and the Carignan that is easier to find in Maule (see [Vignadores de Carignan](#)). In Maule itself there is quite a contrast between the warmer northern half and the cooler southern section that is more like its neighbour Itata. Vine density tends to be high at around 6,000 plants per hectare so it would be impossible to get a tractor into these small vineyards. Horses are still common.

To a large extent this is a nineteenth, or perhaps very early twentieth, century agrarian model, with many features now found attractive by modern wine drinkers, but in which the growers lack power. A co-operative might help, but I was told that the only one ever formed foundered because of bickering among its members over relative grape quality. (They are clearly proud, these farmers.) 'It would be great to have a Settesoli here', agreed Pedro Parra, thinking of the western Sicilian co-op where he advises.

He and winemaker François Massoc share many projects and wine labels, including Clos des Fous, Massoc Frères and Pedro Parra wines. They pay 30 to 70 US cents per kilo of grapes – much more than the base rate from the big companies of 10 US cents a kilo – but they admit that, bearing in mind that poor-quality Colchagua Cabernet fetches 80 US cents a kilo, these southern Chilean farmers should really earn at least this.

See my article on Saturday for more on this topic and more detail about importers.

The following 49 tasting notes are grouped by principal grape variety and then listed by producer then vintage but you can choose otherwise using the self-sort menu.

Order by ▼

CHARDONNAY

- [Aristos, Duquesa Chardonnay 2011 Cachapoal Andes](#)*The fine wine made by François Massoc for Louis-Michel Liger-Belair from vines planted in 1993 at 1,000 m by Massoc's home in Alto Cachapoal so no fear of agrochemicals. (Different parcels are destined for Aristos, Clos des Fous and Calyptra.) Oak is imported from France and malolactic takes place in barrel. The grapes demand 24 months in barrel and several years in bottle, I was told. This 2011 was not released until early 2017. 2011 was a relatively cool vintage.*

Very tight and taut still with masses of acidity and hugely impressive persistence. Still remarkably youthful. Drink 2018-2023

16.5+

- [Aristos, Duquesa Chardonnay 2010 Cachapoal Andes](#)*This was made in the earthquake year*

and any agitation of the vines seems to have done the wine a great deal of good.

Much more evolved than the 2011. Smoky nose, glorious fruit and breadth on the palate – overall tight and rich. I'd love to see this alongside a white burgundy. Drink 2016-2022

17.5

- **Aristos, Duquesa Chardonnay 2009 Cachapoal Andes***The 2010 earthquake apparently affected the 2009 and 2008 in barrels which could not be topped up. Massoc had to wait for some time afterwards before encouraging the malo.*
Quite deep gold, this wine tastes much more than a year older than the 2010. Pretty mature and a bit loose-textured. Drink 2014-2019
16
- **Clos des Fous, Locura 1 2015 Cachapoal Andes***'Terroir de los Andes'. Unoaked Chardonnay with no malolactic fermentation. A year's lees contact.*
No bells and whistles. Just pure fruit that you feel would love to have just a tad more stoniness and acidity to make it a Chablis. Chilean Chablis? 14% Drink 2016-2018
16
- **Clos des Fous, Dulcinea Chardonnay 2014 Malleco***From virtually the same vineyard as Viña Aquitania.*
Round and mellow. Very slight popcorn aroma. Green edge. Not fully integrated. 14% Drink 2016-2019
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 16
- **Pandolfi Price, Larkün Chardonnay 2015 Itata***From the southern, clayey corner of the estate. Grown on basalt with active volcanoes.*
No oak. Fresh and crunchy. Just a little sweet as well as green. 14% Drink 2017-2019
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 16
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2014 Itata***Hottest year ever. Big and broad on the nose. But manages to have some freshness as well as butteriness on the palate. For those who like old-fashioned Meursault.* 15% Drink 2016-2020
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 16.5
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2013 Itata***Matchstick and racy and tense. Lots of energy. Creamy and racy. Still pretty youthful. Had some late-season rains. Still available in the UK.* 13.7% Drink 2018-2024
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 17
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2012 Itata***Mid straw with a green streak. Green fruit with lots of smokiness. Not as integrated as the 2011. Green tea aromas. Lime-leaf flavours. A bit chunky. Still chewy.* Drink 2017-2023
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 16.5
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2011 Itata***Fewer new barrels than 2010 and more whole bunches in the press.*
Pale straw. Lightly matchstick and very tight on the nose. Sleek and lively. Crisp and lively. A little more evolved than Aristos Chardonnay 2011. Drink 2015-2020
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 17
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Chardonnay 2010 Itata***First vintage shown to the market. Enzo's father is still drinking most of the 2008, François' first vintage. Vines more than 30 years old with no irrigation.*
Pale coppery gold. Very fine oak. Refined and fully mature on the nose. Lightly leesy and definitely mature but very appetising with a light butterscotch but not heavy note. 13.5% Drink 2013-2017
Imported into the UK by Stone Vine & Sun 16.5

OTHER WHITES

- **Calyptra, Grand Reserve Sauvignon Blanc 2014 Cachapoal Andes***Planted in 1998 at 1,000 m near Aristos vines on different soils. All tank. 12-hour press. Slow fermentation and not too clean or cold. One year's lees contact and no stirring.*
Very pale. Intense. Menthol and intense. Lots of citrus and excitement. Undertow. Bone dry. Really distinctive. 14% Drink 2016-2019
17
- **De Martino, Gallardía 2016 Itata***70% Muscat and 30% Corinto (that locals believe is Chasselas) grown in the commune of Guarilhue that we visited - cited on the back label.*
This smells extremely youthful - almost of the fermentation vat. Very fresh and crisp and hardly obviously Muscat on the nose. I wonder whether it was early-picked? Some light floweriness. I suspect it will bloom in bottle. 12.5% Drink 2017-2018
16
- **De Martino, Viejas Tinajas 2015 Itata***Muscat. From a vineyard in Trehuaco (cited on the label) and fermented in these 300- to 400-litre clay jars. (Locals regularly ferment in lagares and then age in tinajas.)*
Very pale orange. Strongly orange-marmalade nose verging on syrupy but on the palate it's lively with orange flower water flavours. Refreshing and just off dry. 13% Drink 2016-2018
16.5
- **Rogue Vine, Grand Itata 2014 Itata***Rogue Vine is a partnership between Leonardo Erazo, a Chilean native and technical director at Altos las Hormigas, and American winemaker Justin Decker. This is Leo's wine, challengingly named. The first wine he made back in Itata, concentrating on old vines grown on granite soils. A blend of Muscat and Riesling with a little Sémillon and Chasselas. Wild yeast fermentation in concrete without temperature control, then matured in concrete for one year.*
Racy, well-blended nose with Muscat then Riesling speaking. Great energy. Released June 2015 but still very tense and exciting. Riesling comes out with time. Very long. 13% Drink 2015-2019
Imported into the UK by Indigo Wine 17

ROSE

- **De Martino, Gallardía Rosé Cinsault 2016 Itata***An acquired taste. Pale salmon pink. Very light nose and a slightly tired/bruised fruit flavour - or perhaps it's a terroir effect to which I am not used?* 13% Drink 2017-2018
15
- **Kenos Sangiovese 2015 Cachapoal***Pale salmon. Pretty neutral nose. Losing fruit. Clean and dry but not much in the middle. Fair amount of acidity on the end. Too old to enjoy really.* 12% Drink 2015-2016
15
- **Kenos Garnacha 2015 Curicó***A bit more substance than the Sangiovese rosé on the mid palate but you would want to drink this with food and soon! More vestigial fruit than the Sangiovese Rosé 2015 but past its best.* 12.5% Drink 2015-2016
15.5
- **Massoc Frères 2016 Itata***100% Cinsault, tank sample. To be bottled at the end of February 2017.*
Pale orange. Lightly floral nose - not obviously astringent. De-stemmed and slowly pressed. Pretty but not especially distinctive. Lots of acidity on the end. Pure fruit flavours. 12.5% Drink 2017-2018
15.5

PINOT NOIR

- **Clos des Fous, Pucalán Arenaria Pinot Noir 2014 Aconcagua Costa***Pucalan is the name of the place and Arenaria is the name of the local rocks. 10,000 vines per ha planted in 2008. Mainly mass selections of Pinot Noir clones 02 and 04 from French nursery Guillaume. Quite close to Montes and not too far from Errázuriz.*
Pale blackish ruby. Current release. Recognisably Pinot if very slightly beetroot. Sweet and liquorice, rather heady and exotic. Lots of pleasure even if not the purest. Definitely worth a budget-conscious burgundy lover checking this out! Hot year. 14.8% Drink 2016-2020
16
- **Clos des Fous, Pucalán Arenaria Pinot Noir 2013 Aconcagua Costa***Deep forest floor and very fresh and lively. Very pretty. Fully mature. Moss.*14.5% Drink 2016-2020
16.5
- **Pandolfi Price, Los Patricios Pinot Noir 2013 Itata***Mix of clones. Just two barrels made. Young vines from a hot year.*
Black! Pretty convincingly burgundian aromas. Promise except for the hot year.15.5% Drink 2016-2020
16.5
- **Villaseñor, Puelo Patagonia Pinot Noir 2014 Austral***From what is currently Chile's southernmost commercial vineyard - just one hectare!*
Bright mid cherry red. Does smell of Pinot with a little charred basalt note underneath. Very fresh and direct - made without any wood (though they will start to use oak once the fruit is more concentrated thanks to vine age). Correct and interesting. Subsequent vintages should become even more so. Very clean with good vitality.12% Drink 2016-2019
16.5

PAÍS

- **Massoc Frères País 2015 Itata**500-litre barrel sample. Intense. Ripe elderberries on the nose. Juicy fruit. Sweet and mouth-filling. Designed to age. Makes winemaker François Massoc believe that with a few years of good viticulture you can have a very good, ageable wine from País. Very dense.Drink 2018-2022
16.5
- **Pedro Parra, Pencopolitano 2015 Itata**Dark crimson. Some País in the blend? Yes - mostly, with Carignan and Cinsault and a little bit of Malbec. Smells a bit gamey. Racy and full and broad on the palate. This would be a perfect wine to give a doubter of País. Complex and mouth-filling with reassuringly familiar nose. 1,200 cases.14% Drink 2017-2020
16.5++
- **A Los Viñateros Bravos, Volcanico País 2015 Itata***Exciting concept from Chilean winemaker Leo Erazo of Altos Las Hormigas with hand-drawn labels based on a picture from his iPhone. Based on vines 20 km inland of the commune of Guarilhue. Grown on basalt with roots 6m deep and yields of 25-35 hl/ha. 10,000 bottles filled.*
Bright cherry red with flavours that reminded me of cherry Strepsils (cough sweets). Round and fresh. Juicy and fruity with a mineral undertow Leo describes as phosphorus.12.5% Drink 2016-2017
16
- **A Los Viñateros Bravos, Granitico País 2015 Itata***Companion wine to the Volcanico bottling, from Guarilhue. Made from tiny berries grown on land that dries to solid rock in the summer.*
Dark cherry red with strawberry flavours and the savour of iodine. Fine tannins but also

extremely and satisfyingly fruity. 12.7% Drink 2016-2018

16.5

CINSAULT

- *Clos des Fous, Pour Ma Gueule 2015 Itata* Mostly Cinsault with País, Carignan and Portugais Bleu.
Deep purplish crimson. Pure fruit on granite with real raciness. Lots of chew but not that much persistence at the moment. 14% Drink 2017-2020
16+
- *Pedro Parra, Pencopolitano 2016 Itata* 65% Cinsault, 35% Carignan. Fragrant and savoury. Rich and elderberry. Quite tight on the end. Grainy. Too tight for comfort at the moment. Rather drying finish. 14% Drink 2018-2022
15.5
- *Pedro Parra, Imaginador Cinsault 2016 Itata* Blueish crimson. Lightly dusty nose and with lots of energy though quite a different structure from most wines. Still pretty tense on the finish. A light smokiness. 13% Drink 2018-2022
16.5
- *Pedro Parra, Imaginador Cinsault 2015 Itata* Mid to deep crimson. Grown on granite. Smoky nose. Sweet palate entry. Lots of lift and life. So sweet it's almost sickly! But there is lovely raciness on the palate too. Elderberry. 14% Drink 2017-2020
16
- *Rogue Vine, Grand Itata 2015 Itata* Grown on granite and exposed to the west so many a sea breeze. Cinsault field blend with probably 5% País. De-stemmed and just 500 cases made in concrete. Wild-yeast fermentation without temperature control. Four weeks on skins and a year in concrete.
Another very deep purplish crimson. Mellow, ripe nose. Very luscious and round on the nose and then sweet and lively on the palate. 13% Drink 2017-2021
Imported into the UK by Indigo Wine 16.5+
- *A Los Viñateros Bravos, Canto a lo Divino Cinsault 2014 Itata* Cherry red. super fruity underscored by the sour volcanic liveliness that is characteristic of well-chosen sites in Itata. Excellent freshness and a sort of raspberry ripple flavour. Lots of fun! Drink 2015-2017
16

CARIGNAN

- *Kenos, Reserve Carignan 2013 Curicó* 10-year-old vines. Slightly rank nose and very sweet start then the acid kicks in. Correct but a bit demanding and tart. 13.5% Drink 2016-2018
15.5
- *Las Luciernagas 2013 Maule* Las Luciernagas means glow worm. Made by Felipe Ramirez (ex-Bouchon) who is now winemaker of Chapter 24 in Oregon. 100% Carignan.
Very dark blackish crimson. Ripe, almost too ripe, on the nose. Then the raw acidity of Carignan on the end. Bit too much for me. Drink 2015-2018
15.5
- *Rogue Vine, El Insolente 2014 Itata* Single-vineyard old-vine Carignan. Wild-yeast fermentation in concrete without temperature control. Matured in concrete for one year.
Blackish crimson. Well-integrated black pepper and elderberry on the nose. The rawness is relatively well tamed. 13.5% Drink 2016-2018

CABERNET SAUVIGNON

- **Aristos, Baron Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Cachapoal Andes***This blend contains some wine from Maipo and some Merlot and Petite Sirah.*
Ambitious but still very tight. Wait. Drink 2018-2023
16
- **Aristos, Duque Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 Cachapoal Andes***100% massal selection Cabernet Sauvignon planted at high elevation in 1988 not picked until the beginning of May.*
Smells ripe but not overripe and the palate opens with sweet but overwhelming fruit. Lively full and rich and really quite sophisticated on the palate. Arguably more approachable than the 2011 Chardonnay. Drink 2017-2025
16.5+
- **Kenos, Family Selection Cabernet Sauvignon/Syrah 2010 Central Valley***60% Cabernet Sauvignon from Cachapoal in French oak and 40% Syrah from Curicó in American oak.*
Dark, evolved crimson. Gentle and well integrated. Relatively mature and rich but lively. Excellent balance. Long. Fully mature. 13% Drink 2015-2019
17
- **Kenos, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 Curicó***Very dark purplish crimson. The same balsam note as the Family Selection Cabernet Franc 2011 on the nose makes me wonder whether this is an oak thing. (They buy all their barrels through Amorim, the cork suppliers.) Just a little skinny on the palate and tarter than the blend with Syrah.* 14% Drink 2016-2020
16

OTHER REDS

- **Clos des Fous, Cauquenina 2014 Maule***Old vines. País, Carignan, Cinsault, Syrah, Malbec, Portugais Bleu, Carmenère, Malbec.*
Blackish crimson. Well integrated on the nose already. Pungent nose and very reminiscent of Bordeaux in its structure. Fresh finish. Concrete tank and Bordeaux varieties in barrels. Appetising. 13.5% Drink 2016-2021
16.5
- **Clos des Fous, Tocaó 2013 Bío-Bío***San Rosendo Malbec. From 100-year-old vines in Bío-Bío - see our article.*
Very blackish crimson. 2012 was the first year. A bit of oak in evidence. And then a tad chewy. Tough end. Uncompromising. Drink 2018-2022
16
- **Kenos Tempranillo 2015 Cachapoal***Four months in American oak. Seven-year-old vines.*
Dark crimson. Very leathery nose verging on brett. Sweet start. Not really integrated. The acid and sweetness two different elements. Work in progress. 13% Drink 2017-2019
15
- **Kenos, Reserve Sangiovese 2014 Cachapoal***Just two or three companies - mostly with an Italian background - make a Sangiovese in Chile.*
Part-aged in oak for three months. Bright fruit with some recognisable Sangiovese character. 13.5% Drink 2016-2019
16
- **Kenos, Reserve Syrah 2014 Curicó***French oak barrels for eight months.*

Dark crimson. Sweet, rich nose. Quite concentrated with the oak pinching just a little bit on the finish. Bitter chocolate savoury notes. 14% Drink 2017-2020

15.5

- Kenos, Family Selection Petit Verdot 2013 Cachapoal *Family Selection is one step higher than Reserve. Aged for 12 months in new French barrels.*

Deep crimson. Lots of oak on the nose. Sweet start and a little bit of Bordeaux family structure and rigour on the palate. It is recognisable as Petit Verdot but a bit too oaky for many markets.

13% Drink 2017-2021

16-

- Kenos, Family Selection Cabernet Franc 2011 Cachapoal *Planted in 2002. 80% French and 20% American oak.*

Deep crimson with some evolution at the rim. Strong balsam notes on the nose - not that obvious Cabernet Franc. Sweet start on the palate and hint of ditchwater on the nose! Rather sour finish. 14% Drink 2016-2020

15.5

- Kenos, Family Selection Assemblage 2009 Central Valley *40% Carmenere, 25% Merlot, 20% Cabernet Sauvignon, 15% Syrah aged 12 months in French (80%) and American (20%) barrels.*

Dark crimson. Mellow blend. Mouth-filling. Some spice and green tomato skin character. Some sweetness and some of that high-yield Chilean greenness but not too much. 14% Drink 2014-2019

16.5

- Rogue Vine, Super Itata 2014 Itata *2,100 bottles filled. Smoky iodine pungent nose. So does this mean it's granite? Malbec, Carignan and Syrah on granite. Malbec and Carignan are unusual in Itata. Good force and integration. Already powerfully charming with masses of charming fruit. 13.7% Drink 2016-2022*

17