

hot wines

from hot climes

BY MARGARET SWAINE

Warm your palate and your summer-deprived senses with sun-drenched offerings from South America.



The first time I traveled to Chile I expected a country wild with hot Latin blood where the sun beat down to the rhythm of samba. I must have been influenced by the movie *Blame It On Rio*—where middle-aged Michael

Caine goes bananas over his best friend's daughter. What I found was quite different. First, the country had a distinctly European flare. Second, the year was 1990 and it had just emerged from years under the

military Pinochet government, preceded by the chaotic time of Allende's socialist revolution. Even with democracy finally in place, people were still subdued by the shadow of their turbulent politics.



Chile's European connection helps explain why the wines are so good today. The politics clarify why making and marketing the wines took so long.

The roots of Chilean wine go deep, back to the Spanish conquistadors who planted vines in 1551. Later, in the 1800s, wealthy Chileans travelling to Europe were inspired by the great Bordeaux of the day. They brought back cuttings of varieties, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, Sauvignon Blanc, Semillon and Carménère. While those early links with Europe set the pattern, recent developments in the wine industry have confirmed it. In 1979, Spanish winemaker Miguel Torres jolted the Chilean wine industry into the modern century by revamping a wine estate in Curicó Valley, south of Santiago. In doing so, he showed the world how good Chilean wines could be.

Many foreigners have since followed suit. In 1988, Château Lafite-Rothschild took a half-interest in Los Vascos, an estate in the Colchagua Valley. Since then, two Bordeaux châteaux owners have created Domaine Paul Bruno, the owners of Grand Marnier have started Casa Lapostolle, Château Mouton Rothschild has teamed up with Concha y Toro—and more. In addition, about half of today's Chilean wineries use foreign winemakers to achieve international appeal.

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One legacy of the early European influence is the aforementioned Carménère, a variety close enough to Merlot to have once been mistaken for it. Those Merlot cuttings brought from Bordeaux in the 19th century were actually field mixes that had an estimated 60 to 90 percent of Carménère. The differences between the two were only officially recognized in 1996 in Chile. Meanwhile the variety was long ago phased out in France, despite a reputation for fine quality, as it proved an irregular yielder when grafted. Its low acidity gives it a sweet-savoury taste of blackberry, blueberry and spice.

It was Carménère from newly minted wineries such as Monte Gras and Casa Silva and revitalized historic ones like Laura Hartwig that caught my attention when I returned to Chile a decade later in 2000. It makes wonderfully smooth, deeply flavoured reds, as a pure varietal or blended with others to add further intrigue and structure.

On that visit, I was also impressed at the growing number of super premium reds. Constant sunshine and plenty of available water from the

Andes guarantee fruit will ripen, so we can expect Chilean wines to be fruity and easy to drink. But they are much more. Their top reds can challenge the best and, at anything between \$65 and \$85, have prices to

match. Among these are Sena from a Mondavi-Errazuriz joint venture, Clos Apalta from Lapostolle, and Almaviva from Mouton Rothschild with Concha Y Toro.

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Red Wines to Warm a Winter Chill



CASA LAPOSTOLLE CABERNET SAUVIGNON

LCBO 398800

RAPEL VALLEY, CHILE

\$14.75

A full bodied, ripe blackberry- and cassis-flavoured red with velvety tannins and cedar notes from 12 months in French oak.
MATCH: Roast beef, steak, meat stews.

CARMEN MERLOT

LCBO 248625

CENTRAL VALLEY, CHILE

\$10.95

Medium bodied, ripe with soft supple tannins, its character is red fruit with some black pepper and herbs. Bouquet has hints of smoky powdered chocolate.
MATCH: Lamb, game birds, pepper steak or barbecued meats.

CONCHA Y TORO CASILLERO DEL DIABLO MERLOT

LCBO 427088

RAPEL VALLEY, CHILE

\$10.35

Ripe spiced berry with smooth tannins, full body and some minty herbal tones.
MATCH: Lamb, red meats.

ARESTI MONTEMAR CARMÉNÈRE

LCBO 605683

CURICO VALLEY, CHILE

\$9.60

Spiced, ripe and jammy with blueberry, blackberry, herbs and black pepper flavours. Dense and full bodied.
MATCH: Steaks, spicy dishes.

ERRAZURIZ MERLOT

LCBO 297887

CURICO VALLEY, CHILE

\$12.90

Medium supple body with leafy undergrowth, vanilla and dark chocolate hints to the good fruit ripeness.
MATCH: Duck, pork roast.

SANTA RITA CABERNET SAUVIGNON RESERVA

LCBO 253872

MAIPO VALLEY, CHILE

\$11.95

Great value, some herbaceous edge to the nose, then ripe berry fruit, vanilla oak and soft tannins with a spiced finish.
MATCH: Lamb, spicy sausages.

VINA CARMEN GRANDE VIDURE CABERNET SAUVIGNON RESERVE

LCBO 439166

MAIPO VALLEY, CHILE

\$15.85

Grande Vidure is another name for Carménère. Aged 10 months in French and American oak. Huge warmth with velvety rich ripe fruit and vanilla oak. Chewy and dense but balanced and impressive.
MATCH: Grilled meats, lamb, beef.

TRUMPETER MERLOT

LCBO 467985

MENDOZA, ARGENTINA

\$13.45

Aged in French and American oak. Cinnamon spiced oak throughout with mellow ripeness of fruit. Tobacco, plum and berry flavours with balance and decent intensity.
MATCH: Duck, game birds.

destination, and in the Picton Area you'll find Waring House, www.waringhouse.com. This past fall it introduced a new series of wine appreciation classes conducted by sommelier Andrew Laliberte. Should you venture to Huron County, the Little Inn of Bayfield, www.littleinn.com, is a wonderful spot for a wine and dine retreat. Near Collingwood? Try Silver Springs Culinary Retreat at www.silverspringsretreat.com.

If you would rather stay home, consider inviting some friends over to watch the latest of the LCBO's educational programming—a video series called *Shelf Talk*. This series of videos takes you to destinations around the world where you'll visit the vineyards, cellars and regions that produce the fine products we enjoy. The videos are available in select LCBO stores and online at www.lcbogifts.com. To date, there are nine in the series, with titles such as “American Whiskey,” “Wines of Ontario,” “Champagne and Sparkling Wine,” “Tequila,” “Wines of South Africa,” “Port,” “Beers of Belgium,” “Icewine,” and “Wines of the American Pacific Northwest,” with plenty more to come. They are best viewed while sharing a glass of the featured topic. **FD**

Michael Fagan has been helping LCBO and VINTAGES customers make the right wine decisions for more than 20 years.

HOT WINES FROM HOT CLIMES

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Half of the production is in the hands of three wineries, though in the past 15 years the number of wineries has blossomed to over 110, giving lots of choice to the consumer. It's a sign of confidence in the quality potential that large land owners and growers like Aresti have put their money behind winemaking after 50 years of selling only in bulk. On my visit to Aresti last March, I was impressed with the marketing savvy and plans to create a high-quality prestigious brand.

On this trip I learned that in 2000 Chile had an abundance of crop that suggested oversupply. The country had proved so successful at growing grapes it was now time to thin crops, drop volume and up the quality for even the simplest table wine. Good soil, low yields, old vines and talented winemaking is the formula for greatness. We can expect much of Chile in the future.

On the other hand, whither goes Argentina? A massive country, the world's fifth largest producer of wine, it was poised last year to conquer the world. While vineyards have grown in Argentina since the mid-16th century, until the 1990s quantity was emphasized over quality. Simply meeting internal Argentine demand

was a challenge. At one stage, per capita wine consumption topped 90 liters per year. Only recently, when the figure dropped in half, did winemakers turn their attention to overseas buyers. This meant modernizing the wine infrastructure and making cleaner, brighter, fruitier wines. Argentinians traditionally drank merely vinous wines—low in tannin, fruit and acidity. Foreign influence has changed things. Investing heavyweights from abroad have included LVMH of France, Allied Domecq of Britain, Kendall-Jackson of California and Concha y Toro of Chile. As in Chile, the 1990s saw famous foreign wine consultants imparting winery wisdom there. Over US\$250 million has been plowed into making new wineries and refurbishing old ones in the past five years.

Most of the country's wine is from Mendoza, a dry sunny district close to the Andes. The grape portfolio goes beyond the popular Chardonnay, Merlot and Cabernet to include such reds as Malbec, Syrah, Tempranillo and Italian varieties such as Sangiovese and Bonarda. In whites, the aromatic Torronté is the nearest thing to an indigenous varietal. But will Argentina's free-falling economy spur exports or cause foreigners to flee? Certainly we're seeing more and better quality in the LCBO in 2002, so only time will tell. **FD**

filling, spreading to smooth the top. Press plastic wrap onto the surface and chill.

6 Whisk the cream until soft peaks form. Whisk in the remaining rum. Remove the plastic from top of the tart and then spread over the cream. Just before serving, garnish with the remaining banana and pieces of banana crisp topping.

Serves 6 **FD**

UNCORKING WINE FINDS

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All of Italy is a vineyard and I constantly find delicious wines there. Ricasoli was named winery of the year in 2002 by *Gambero Rosso*, the country's most important wine publication. Ricasoli's Brolio Chianti Classico (LCBO 3962, \$20.55) is pure elegance with hints of violets in the bouquet, great grip and sophistication with firm berry tastes. Amarone wines, made from grapes dried for at least 40 days after harvest, then vinified, are delicious, velvety, rich winter wines, great with Parmesan and fruits (dried or fresh) after a meal. You can't go wrong with Masi Amarone Della Valpolicella (LCBO 317057, \$34.05) or Tedeschi (VINTAGES 433417, \$34.95). A less expensive alternative is Folonari Valpolicella Classico Ripasso (LCBO 481838, \$14.90) made by passing the wine over the amarone marc (pips, skins etc.). It has full-bodied raisiny

flavours with a rich structure, soft but lingering in the mouth.

Other delightful reds? Australia's Peter Lehmann Cabernet Sauvignon (LCBO 605741, \$19.95) for its oak complexity and deep ripe fruit; Portugal's J.P. Vinhos Tinto da Anfora (LCBO 227256, \$12.95) for its great value, with smooth, supple but intense spiced fruit; and Spain's Montecillo Crianza Rioja (LCBO 144493, \$12.95) for its gentle vanilla oaky, harmonious medium-bodied silkiness. **FD**

Margaret Swaine is a Toronto wine and drink columnist who writes for Toronto Life, Chatelaine and other publications. She conducts educational seminars as well as wine and food matching dinners about town.

THIRST FOR KNOWLEDGE

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rather spend a weekend away, head to Niagara and sign up for one of the programs at www.winecountrycooking.com held at Strewn Winery or Good Earth Cooking School at www.goodearthcooking.com, both of which focus on local ingredients, including wonderful VQA wines.

If you're in the Ottawa area try one of Mrs. McGarrigle's Cooking Classes. The company's lineup can be found at www.mustard.ca and, as the site name might suggest, it is a great place to pick up some wonderful mustards too. Prince Edward County is another emerging Ontario ▶



CRANBERRY ORANGE LAMB CHOPS

Cranberries and the tangy essence of orange transform these lamb chops into an easy, yet elegant meal. Excellent when served with parsley potatoes and vegetables.

6	Frenched Lamb Chops or	6	In a small saucepan over medium heat, combine sugar,
4	Loin Chops, 1" thick	4	cranberries, orange juice, rind, Dijon mustard and allspice.
1/2 cup	sugar	125 ml	Cook until mixture boils and cranberries pop (about 10 to 12
1 cup	cranberries	250 ml	minutes). Set aside. In a preheated broiler, 4" from heat, broil
1/4 cup	orange juice	50 ml	lamb chops on one side for 6 minutes. Turn chops and broil 4
1 tsp	grated orange rind	5 ml	minutes longer. Spoon one generous teaspoonful of sauce over
1 tsp	Dijon mustard	5 ml	each chop. Broil for 1 minute longer. Serve extra sauce on the
	pinch of allspice		side. Serves 2.



www.lambrecipes.ca