
Chapter 36

Chile



Climate and Grape Growing

Climate: **Warm Mediterranean**

- Sunny, dry = reliable grapes/no fungal disease
- Irrigation needed when rainfall low
- El Niño years = rainfall increases dramatically
- La Niña years = drought may occur

900km (N-S)/100km (wide)

4 key geographical features:

1. West = Pacific Ocean + some coastal mountains
2. East = Andes
3. North of Santiago = mountain ranges merge
4. South of Santiago = depression between coastal mountains and Andes (Central Valley)
 - a. Some gaps caused by river valleys

Humboldt Current (up from Antarctica) - cool air blown along river valleys

- Strongest: where coastal mountains lowest and valleys close to Pacific
- Fog a by-product - close to coast

Close to Andes foothills = cold air blown down mountains overnight (large diurnal range)

Sustainable/organic winemaking promoted.

Grape Varieties and Wine Styles

Black grapes

Cabernet Sauvignon

- Most planted grape
- **Simply/fruity** → **full-bodied/premium**
- **Ripe black fruits/herbaceous**
- Blended with: *Merlot/Carmenere/Syrah*

Merlot

- **Inexpensive/med-body/fruity** → **premium/fuller-bodied**

Carmenère

- **Late ripening** = grows in warmest/sunniest sites
- **Full-body/high tannin/black fruits/herbaceous** - if underripe
- Signature grape variety

Syrah

- **Elqui Valley** (cooler) = **lighter body/peppery**
- **Colchagua Valley** (warmer) = **black fruits/fuller body**

Pinot Noir

- Cooler locations (ie, San Antonio/Casablanca Valley)

White grapes

Sauvignon Blanc

- Performs well in cooler sites (San Antonio/Casablanca Valley)
- **High acid/ripe apple/citrus/tropical fruit/some herbaceous notes** - some lees stirring/oak for texture

Chardonnay

- Most in international style; **ripe fruit + oak**
- **Limari Valley/Aconcagua Valley/Casablanca Valley** = **elegant/ restrained**

Muscat of Alexandria = for grape brandy 'Pisco'/Viognier/Gewurztraminer/Riesling

Aromatic whites from cooler Bio Bio + Itata Valleys

Coquimbo Region

Coquimbo Region

- Most northerly region (borders Atacama Desert)
- 3 subregions; **Elqui Valley/Limari Valley/Choapa Valley**
- Less plantings but higher quality
- Sunshine high/cooling sea breezes/some vineyards at an altitude
- Challenge: lack of water.
 - Solution: irrigation - but expensive
- **Elqui Valley** = **high rep SB + Syrah**
- **Limari Valley** = **rep for Chard**

Aconcagua Region

Second smallest wine region

3 sub-regions:

Aconcagua Valley

- Steep-sided, between coastal mountains and the Andes
- Fertile valley floor = warm growing conditions
 - **Cab Sauv, Syrah, Carmenere**
 - **Rich fruit/high alcohol/high tannin**
- Producers want to reduce alcohol/freshen fruit = plantains now on slopes/towards the coast

Casablanca Valley/San Antonio Valley

- Similar characteristics; between coastal mountains and Pacific
 - Morning fog/afternoon winds (cooling)
 - **SB/Chard**
 - **Leyda Valley** (in San Antonio) = **reputation for SB**
 - **PN = red berry/herbal** (coolest sites)
 - **Syrah** (Casablanca Valley) = warmer east vineyard sites = **well structured/peppery**
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Central Valley Region

From Santiago → Itata Valley

Vast, flat warm; grapes ripen early - focus on inexpensive fruity *Merlot/Chard*

Maipo Valley

- Surrounded by mountains/little coastal influence
- Premium sites = Andes Foothills (cooling air from mountains)
- **Reputation for Cab Sauv - minty character**

Rapel subregion (large/varied zone)

- **Cachapoal Valley**
 - Warm area/no ocean breeze
 - **Carmenere** - valley floors
 - **Cab Sauv/Syrah** - cooler, east end of Valley
- **Colchagua Valley** (large/varied)
 - Central area = warm/some ocean influence
 - **Full-bodied reds (Cab Sauv, Syrah, Carmenere)**
 - Some vineyards valley slopes (Apalta) = premium rep
 - West = lots of Pacific influence - high quality wines

Curicó Valley/Maule Valley

- Southern end of Central Valley
 - Warm/fertile soils = inexpensive/fruity red + white
 - Maule (cooler) = wines retain acidity
 - Dry-farmed/old vines in west of region from **Carignan** variety - **full-body/concentrated** from ancient, low-yielding bush vines
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Southern Region

Cooler/wetter further south

Itata Valley/Bio Bio Valley/Malleco Valley

Bio Bio/Itata

- *Pais/Muscat of Alexandria* (consumed locally)
- *PN/Chard/aromatics* (Bio Bio) - potential for high quality

Malleco

- Smallest/most southern
 - *Chard/PN* (some premium prod interest)
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Chilean Wine Laws

GI = **Denominaciones de Origin (DOs)**

- 4 principal regions: **Coquimbo/Aconcagua/Central Valley/Southern Region**
 - 13 subregions (generally follows valleys running east to west)
- Based on Chile's administrative regions = very broad

2012 = further classifications added = vineyard sites as distance from coast (not latitude)

- **Costa** = for coastal areas
 - **Entre Cordilleras** = area between mountain ranges
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Multiple Choice Practice Questions

1) Which of the following regions is best known for its high-quality Cabernet Sauvignon in Chile?

- a) Casablanca Valley
- b) Maipo Valley
- c) Limari Valley
- d) Bio Bio Valley

2) Which grape variety is most associated with the region of Colchagua Valley?

- a) Chardonnay
- b) Pinot Noir
- c) Merlot
- d) Carmenère

3) Which of the following Chilean wine regions is renowned for its Sauvignon Blanc?

- a) Elqui Valley
- b) Maule Valley
- c) Leyda Valley
- d) Maipo Valley

4) The Leyda Valley is a sub-region of which larger wine region in Chile?

- a) Aconcagua
- b) Maipo Valley
- c) Central Valley
- d) Casablanca Valley

5) Which of the following is a significant characteristic of wines produced from the Carmenère grape in Chile?

- a) High acidity and low tannins
- b) Herbal notes and green bell pepper flavours
- c) Light body and floral aromas
- d) High alcohol and jammy fruit flavours

Answers

1. b) Maipo Valley

2. d) Carmenère

3. c) Leyda Valley

4. a) Aconcagua

5. b) Herbal notes and green bell pepper flavours