

Maipo Cabernet Sauvignon

Home to Chile's most established producers and priciest wines, Maipo is also where the most highly regarded Cabernet terroirs are found, says Peter Richards MW

JUST AS SANTIAGO is Chile's beating heart – the capital city is home to more than a third of the country's 17 million inhabitants – so Maipo Cabernet Sauvignon is the gravitational force at the centre of Chilean wine.

A whopping third of the entire national vineyard is accounted for by Cabernet Sauvignon. It sprawls over some 38,400ha (hectares), which is more than the combined total of the next three contenders (Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Merlot).

Although Maipo isn't the biggest growing area for Cabernet Sauvignon in Chile – Colchagua and Maule top that table – it is the most celebrated and traditional. This is where Chile's fine wine adventure began, back in the mid-19th century, when wealthy Chileans returned from Europe with vine cuttings, planting them on family estates. Now Maipo is home to some of Chile's most established producers and priciest wines, as well as what are among its most highly regarded Cabernet terroirs, including the gravel terraces of Pirque and Puente Alto, the slopes of Macul and the colluvial fans around Alto Jahuel. Cabernet accounts for 52% of Maipo vines, which speaks volumes about the extent to which Cabernet is prized here.

Maipo Cabernet has for many years been Chile's calling card in terms of quality wine. This is starting to change now as Chilean wine gains ever greater strength in depth ('breadth' might be a more apt term), but it remains a key reference point in the nation's wine landscape.

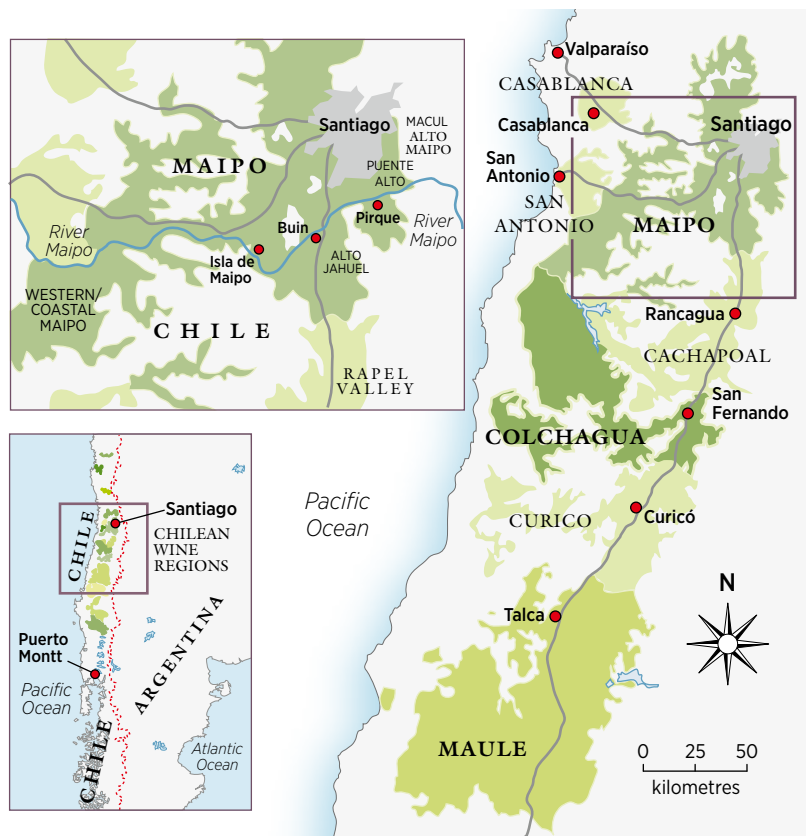
In the Andean foothills

The hotbed of quality in Maipo Cabernet can be found directly to the south and east of Santiago in an area known as Alto ('high') Maipo. This is an area that sits on the skirts of the Andean foothills and benefits not only from cool mountain breezes at night but also some top quality alluvial and colluvial soils, especially around the borders of the Maipo River. The best sites deliver a refined tannic structure, notable harmony and good ageing potential. Alto Maipo hallmarks tend to be notes of vivid cassis, dried fig and warm earth, with a hint of bay leaf and eucalyptus.

What might be termed Central Maipo, to the southwest of the city, including zones such as Isla de Maipo and Buin, is warmer territory and produces more corpulent, ripe Cabernet in a range of expressions. Western, or Coastal Maipo, is relatively unexplored but there may well be potential for more coastal expressions of the variety.

Maipo Cabernet accounts for many of the celebrated names of Chilean wine: Don Melchor (Concha y Toro); Casa Real (Santa Rita); Antiguas Reservas (Cousiño Macul); Almaviva (Concha y Toro with Baron Philippe de Rothschild); Domus Aurea; Viñedo Chadwick. The list goes on – and now includes newer names doing exciting things, such as William Fèvre, Antiyal, Intriga and Pérez Cruz.

Despite the impressive history, there are threats to Maipo's Cabernet vineyards. Santiago's rapacious urban sprawl has already seen some historic vineyards concreted over. Does this mean that buying the wines, and thus supporting the producers to stand firm, can be viewed as conservation? It's a nice thought. But let's enjoy the best for what they are: bona fide expressions of Chilean Cabernet, with a strong sense of place, history and identity.



Maipo: know your vintages

2012 Scorching hot, dry vintage; challenging year, some are overcooked.

2011 The second cool, dry, long season in a row; very promising, well-balanced wines.

2010 Well-balanced wines after a cool, dry season (in great quake year).

2009 Warm, dry, high-yielding vintage, initially lauded but some wines were overdone; choose carefully.

2008 A moderate, middling vintage: decent wines with a few standouts.

2007 Excellent Cabernet vintage, long and dry. The best are maturing nicely.

2006 Mild, dry season gave solid but not outstanding Cabernet Sauvignon.

2005 Powerful, muscular style.

2004 Tricky, variable vintage; best have aged well.

Chile: the facts

Chilean total wine vineyards: 116,831ha (hectares)

Cabernet Sauvignon plantings: 38,426ha

Cabernet Sauvignon as % of total Chilean wine vineyard: 33%

Maipo total wine vineyards: 12,433ha

Cabernet Sauvignon total in Maipo: 6,489ha

Cabernet Sauvignon as % of total Maipo vineyard: 52%

Cabernet Sauvignon vineyard areas in key Maipo

sub-zones: Buin (1,263ha), Paine (1,149ha), Isla de Maipo (837ha), Melipilla (531ha), Pirque (427ha) ➤

Peter Richards MW is the author of The Wines of Chile (Mitchell Beazley) and the Regional Chair for Chile at the Decanter World Wine Awards

The results

The best wines were solely or predominantly Cabernet, and 2011 was the standout vintage, as were those wines with controlled alcohols. Mark O'Halleron reports

CABERNET SAUVIGNON CAN confidently lay claim to being the bedrock of Chile's phenomenal success in recent decades, and Maipo in particular has long been regarded as the heartland for the variety. As Patricio Tapia said: 'For me this tasting was a confirmation that Cabernet Sauvignon is the best or most interesting grape from Chile.' Peter Richards MW was similarly pleased by the wines on show: 'I think that the two top wines we came out with are really promising for the state of Cabernet in Chile.'

Starting with the negatives, however, this tasting also looked at Cabernet-based blends, which fared less well, particularly when the percentage of Cabernet dropped. 'If you do blend then you need a dominant and a submissive in the relationship,' Toby Morrhall says. 'Some of the blends were up to 40% Carmenere and for me that's too sweet and obliterates the tautness of the Cabernet.' Morrhall was keen on the blends that had a splash of Merlot, while Richards was 'pleasantly surprised' by the wines that contained 5% to 10% Syrah: 'They added a bit of pepper to the nose, and flesh to the mid-palate.'

The wines that were either completely or largely Cabernet Sauvignon stole the show, and there were

'The great thing about the best Maipo Cabernets is that they have a tension to them' **Toby Morrhall**

certain regions of Maipo that garnered particular praise, as outlined by Tapia: 'If you want to look beyond the clichéd minty, eucalyptus characters associated with Chilean Cabernet, then the regions of Pirque, Puente Alto and Macul have an electricity and tension to the tannins that, to me, is the real Maipo character.'

Morrhall agreed: 'Maipo is a big region. There are some good bits in Isla de Maipo but also riper parts that produce softer, more blowy wines. The fine terroirs are where you have cool air coming down from the mountains in the evening. The great thing about the best Maipo Cabernets is they're not just juicy, round, rich and cassis-like, they have a tension to them, they're firm and linear, taut, like a marathon runner, not with the bulky muscularity of a sprinter; they may look sinewy, but they go the distance.' Richards was likewise impressed, though hoped for

The scores

66 wines tasted

2

Outstanding

1

Highly recommended

35

Recommended

25

Fair

3

Poor

0

Faulty

9

Good value (£12 and under)

The tasters' verdicts

Toby Morrhall



Morrhall has been at The Wine Society since 1992 and is its buyer for South American wines, among others. Previously he has worked as a buyer for European Cellars and UK supermarket Sainsbury's.

Morrhall's verdict

'I think this tasting demonstrated how Cabernet Sauvignon thrives in the Upper Maipo, particularly in the communes of Puente Alto and Pirque, which are relatively high in altitude, about 500m to

650m. The best soils from these communes are the warm and dry gravel and stone alluvial terraces laid down by the Maipo River, which Cabernet loves. At night, cool air descends from the Andes to these communes, reducing night-time respiration, which preserves colour and acidity. In the best terroirs Cabernet for me shows aromas of cedar, cigar box and lead pencil, and has a firm, taut, linear and very long palate. Particularly in the cooler 2011 and 2010 we got these aromas and palate structures in the best wines.

'Regarding blending, I see the need for it less in Maipo than in Bordeaux. Pre global warming, Médoc Cabernet Sauvignon provided the angular skeleton, and some Merlot and Cabernet Franc some welcome flesh. Even the coolest of these high-altitude Maipo communes are warmer and have much more light than Bordeaux, so 100% Maipo Cabernet Sauvignon wines are generally ripe and sweet enough alone. A little Cabernet Franc can enhance the cedary character. However, blends with more than 20% Carmenere or Syrah result in an overly rich wine and smother the elegant Upper Maipo character with sweetness.'

Peter Richards MW



Richards is the Decanter World Wine Awards Regional Chair for Chile and his book *The Wines of Chile* was shortlisted for the André Simon Award. His TV and radio credits include Saturday Kitchen (BBC1), The Food Programme (BBC Radio 4) and Taste (Sky One).

Richards' verdict

'Chile needs to work on imbuing its Cabernets with more scent and grace. This means harvesting earlier and prioritising

only the best terroirs. In this tasting, the best wines (as ever with Cabernet) were fresh and beguiling, with an overall harmony between firm, fine tannins, fresh acidity and an elegantly linear profile. The 2011 vintage seemed to deliver this style best of all – a relatively cool year giving the wines natural lift, brightness and lower alcohol – a welcome change from the heft and brawn of, for example, the 2009s, which were ungainly by comparison. Vibrancy, tang and leafy perfume are part of Cabernet's DNA and Chilean producers should not be frightened of this.

'It was gratifying to see fewer simplistic wines – those ruined by over-extraction, over-oaking or rampant eucalypt character – which shows there is growing sensitivity to these issues. Sub-zones in Alto Maipo, such as Pirque and Puente Alto, showed their class; other sites clearly need replanting, being either too cool or too hot for Cabernet to work well. Cabernet Sauvignon remains a work in progress in Chile.

'I would love to see wine growers and winemakers taking a risk on more maritime climates, too – above all, working to give Cabernets more diversity, poise and resonance.'

expansion towards the coast as well. 'Alto or Andean territories are really interesting at the moment,' he said. 'You get coolness from the altitude and there are really interesting soils up there, but I'd like to see more sites on the soils by the ocean. People need to take the risk.'

As for vintages, 2011 was singled out, noted by Richards for its 'freshness, brightness and lower alcohol'. Tapia was 'in love with 2011 for its restraint', while Morrhall added: 'It was a vintage where phenolic ripeness arrived at lower sugar levels, so you could pick earlier, and there is now also a wish to pick earlier, even it's just a case of 1% to 1.5% less alcohol – it makes a hell of a difference when you get a wine back to 13% or 13.5% and I think that some of those wines will age beautifully.'

Alcohol levels were also Richards' significant bugbear: 'If you have a wine with 14.5% alcohol it really sticks out. We all know that there are great wines in the world with that level of alcohol, but all the elements of the wine's structure play around that and work in context. With these wines, when you have really sweet fruit and high alcohol, it's difficult. Producers should not be afraid of leafy or green aromas and dare to pick a bit earlier; you're not going to get underripe grapes in Chile unless you're doing something wrong. We need to get the scent back into Chilean Cabernet – it's part of the grape's DNA.'

Entry criteria:
Producers and UK agents were invited to submit their latest-release Maipo Cabernet Sauvignons (minimum 60% Cabernet Sauvignon). A maximum of two wines per producer was allowed, at a minimum of £8 a bottle (retail price)

Outstanding 18.5–20pts (95–100pts)



Apaltagua, Signature Cabernet Sauvignon, Puente Alto, Alto Maipo 2010

Decanter average score: 18.75/20pts (95+/100pts)

Individual judges' scores:

Toby Morrhall 19 Peter Richards MW 18.5 Patricio Tapia 19

£15.49 Anthony Byrne

Apaltagua is one of those Chilean wineries that can be difficult to pin down. It's owned by an American businessman with Armenian roots, Edward Tutunjian, and makes wines from all over central and coastal Chile. The winery is known as a decent producer of hearty reds and increasingly good whites; with this Cabernet, however, they have put themselves firmly on the Maipo map. Winemaker Benjamin Mei, with expert guidance from Alvaro Espinoza, used vineyards in the Mariscal area of Puente Alto to craft a wine that speaks eloquently and elegantly of its origins and variety.

Toby Morrhall Very fine cedary oak with a lead pencil character bolstering the nose. This is sweet yet fine, with a refreshing mid-palate. Very classy.

Peter Richards MW Lovely, figgy, herbal nose with a touch of evolution. Complex and inviting, this is firm and dense, gastronomic, impressive.

Patricio Tapia Earthy but ripe flavours with hints of spice and mushroom. Warm and voluptuous, with minty flavours giving a lovely freshness. With time in the glass, the wine evolves into eucalyptus and mint, with tannins building up impressive structure.

Drink 2013–2020 Alcohol 14%

Patricio Tapia



Tapia attended Bordeaux University where he studied wine tasting and winemaking. He is the author of several books including his annual South American wine guide *Descorchados*. Tapia is also the critic for the wines of Argentina, Chile and Spain at Wine & Spirits Magazine in New York.

Tapia's verdict

'Chilean wines have made progress in many respects, one of which is varietal

diversity. Despite the very good Syrah, Carmenere, Carignan and even Cinsault (yes! Cinsault!), it is the Cabernet Sauvignon that continues to lead the way. And not just any Cabernet Sauvignon, of course, but that of Maipo, an area that has been producing it for 150 years.

'I'm certainly not talking just about quality, but primarily about character. Chilean Cabernet, especially from Alto Maipo, smells and tastes like no other. It was this sense of place that most caught my attention. Although some of the wines might not have had all the concentration and muscle that people might expect from a Cabernet, most did have those minty aromas, fresh acidity and herbal notes that Chileans have grown up with – the reds of our childhood.

'But this tasting was not entirely about terroir. Some wines were overripe or had too much oak – pretty basic and rather obvious ways to win over the market, and crude ways to hide their identity.

'The tasting also showed the excellence of Maipo's 2010 vintage, as well as how some winemakers won the battle of the warm 2009 vintage to obtain wines with elegance and balance.'



Undurraga, TH Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2011 18.5 (95) TM 18.5 PR 18.5 PT 18.5

£10.95–£11.25 Slurp, The Wine Society

Undurraga is one of the nation's historic producers, now controlled by the Colombian Picciotto family. Its portfolio is mixed in quality but the consistent highlight is the TH (Terroir Hunter) range made by über-talented Rafael Urrejola, formerly of Viña Leyda. This softly spoken, tousle-haired winemaker is one of Chile's brightest wine stars, imbuing his wines with a compelling mixture of complexity and drinkability. This was made from a 21-year-old, 2.7ha vineyard in Pirque; its tannic finesse and long finish speak of an age-worthy, classic style.

TM Cedary nose, fine integrated oak. Elegant understated palate with grip and freshness. Long and very fine.

PR Dusty, ripe fruit with leather nuances. Juicy, engaging, brooding, with crisp acidity and very fine tannins. This is classy Cabernet with a good mix of sweet fruit and firm structure.

PT Dry cherry and strawberry notes on the restrained nose. Austere, well structured palate with strong, yet not violent tannins, supporting the weight of the fruit. It feels serious and restrained and young with a long life ahead. A very elegant expression of Pirque.

Drink 2013–2020 Alc 14%

Maipo Cabernet Sauvignon

Highly Recommended 17–18.25pts (90–94pts)



Concha y Toro, Marques de Casa Concha Cabernet Sauvignon, Puente Alto 2010 17.25 (90+)

TM 17.5 PR 17.5 PT 17

£11.20–£12.99 Sainsburys, Tanners, TJ Wines

Lovely amalgam of cedary fruit and lead pencil oak on the nose. A ripe and voluptuous version of Cabernet, this is grand, filling the palate with its sweet flavours. Lovely gravelly layers – really serious tannin, well integrated acidity, long and complex. **Drink** 2013–2019 **Alc** 14.5%

‘It makes a big difference when you get wine back to 13% or 13.5% alcohol – some will age beautifully’

Toby Morrhall

Recommended 15–16.75pts (83–89pts)

Wine	Score	TM	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Canepa, Magnificum Cabernet Sauvignon, Puente Alto 2007	16.25 (87)	16	17	15.5	Interesting. Lovely, earthy wood smoke nose, dried roasted pepper. Mature and ripe with hints of sweet red fruit and tobacco within a super-soft texture.	14.5%	2013–2016	£30	Harry's Road Fine Wines (Belfast), Seckford
Concha y Toro, Terrunyo Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2009	16.25 (87)	16	17	16	This has a good balance between ripe fruit and pungent acidity. It is a bit hot and loose on the finish, but not overdone or invasive. A smart wine.	14.5%	2013–2019	£15.95–£20.80	Corks Out, Wine 360, Wine Direct
Cono Sur, 20 Barrels Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2009	16.25 (87)	16.5	16.5	16	Elegant roasted pepper, cassis, plum and warm grass nose. A massive wine with big tannins and fruit, but with an unfortunate kick of alcohol on the finish.	14%	2013–2018	£15.99	The Drink Shop
Veramonte, Primus Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	16.25 (87)	15.5	17	16	Pretty balanced fruit. Elegant and fine with delicate red fruit and charcoal-like oak. A bit lacking in cogency, but it's admirable, and many will warm to it.	14.6%	2013–2017	N/A UK	www.veramonte.com
Aquitania, Lazuli Cabernet Sauvignon 2004	16 (86)	16	17	15	Quite fresh still for 2007. Some nice savoury elements. Aged pretty well with a fine texture. Not dried out. You'd reach for this.	14.3%	2013–2016	£22 (2003)	L'Assemblage
Cono Sur, Reserva Especial Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	16 (86)	15.5	16	16.5	Fine oak mingles with cedary Cabernet. In the blend Merlot and Syrah sweeten the mid-palate and reduce the tension. A decent, figgy Cabernet.	13.5%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.conosur.com
Pérez Cruz, Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2011	16 (86)	15	17	16	Ripe, rich. Quite a lot of high-quality oak, coffee-grounds aromas. Fluid, with seductive cherry flavours; sweet spices on the finish.	13.5%	2013–2019	£10.99	Hallgarten Druitt, Novum Wines
Santa Ema, Barrel Reserve 60/40 2010	16 (86)	16	15	17	Gently minty and ripe plum nose. Vibrant and tense, this is a good example of the vintage with its freshness and red fruit.	13.5%	2013–2017	N/A UK	www.santaema.cl
Baron de Rothschild & Concha y Toro, Almaviva, Puente Alto 2009	15.75 (85+)	17	15	15.5	Toasty, smoky dark fruit and juicy cassis. Spicy flavours of dry cherry and cinnamon on the palate with a sweet finish and soft tannins.	14.5%	2013–2017	£75 (2008)	The Wine Society
Cono Sur, Block 18 Single Vineyard El Recurso Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	17	15.5	Menthol and spices dominate the aromas here with a hint of cherry. Firm but gastronomic. Very pleasant Cabernet which could develop.	13.5%	2013–2017	N/A UK	www.conosur.com
De Martino, Single Vineyard Las Aguilas Cabernet Sauvignon 2010	15.75 (85+)	15	15	17	Fine, pretty, cedary nose, but quite big and powerful on the palate with spiced fruits and some nice, fresh acidity.	14%	2013–2017	£20	Berry Bros & Rudd
Indómita, Duetta Cabernet Sauvignon-Carmenere 2010	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	16	Generous in herbal aromas and slightly animal. Inviting palate profile, nicer than the nose. Good sweet fruit, briary resonance. A bit contrived but good.	14.5%	2013–2018	£10.85	Widely available
Intriga, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010	15.75 (85+)	16	16	15	Lovely, floral Cabernet nose with aromas of fine oak. Needs more freshness and grace, teeters on over-extraction but it's not bad in this context.	14.5%	2013–2018	N/A UK	www.intriga.cl
Quebrada de Macul, Domus Aurea Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2009	15.75 (85+)	15.5	16	16	The fresher climate here seems to moderate the warmth of the vintage. Understated wine that could blossom when decanted.	14%	2013–2018	£39.99 (2008)	Naked Wines
Valdivieso, Caballo Loco Grand Cru, Maipo Andes 2010	15.75 (85+)	16.5	15.5	15.5	Lifted blue fruit and cassis. Dense, juicy, appealing. Fresh, balanced and with a silky texture.	14.5%	2013–2017	£20	Bibendum
Valdivieso, Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2011	15.75 (85+)	15	16	16	Firm, grainy texture. Decent food-friendly style, pungent acidity and fresh, medium palate. Touch warm on the finish which is a little short.	14%	2013–2017	£15	Bibendum
Carmen, Gold Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2010	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Filled with mint and cherry aromas. Sturdy and stodgy. Decent, powerful, with plenty of sweet flavours, but lacks grace.	14%	2013–2018	£49.99	Hallgarten Druitt, Novum Wines
Santa Alicia, Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2010	15.5 (85)	15.5	14.5	16.5	Generous in minty and eucalyptus aromas, this is very Alto Maipo in character. Grainy, slightly gritty palate.	14.5%	2013–2017	N/A UK	www.myliko.co.uk
Santa Ema, Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon 2010	15.5 (85)	15	15	16.5	Feels fresh and vibrant, generous in red fruit. Quite engaging with leafy and roasted herbal notes; some very nice elements but a bit hot on the finish.	13.5%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.santaema.cl
TerraMater, Vineyard Reserve Cabernet, Isla de Maipo 2011	15.5 (85)	15	15.5	16	Taut style, will benefit from a bit of bottle age. Crunchy, juicy, fresh fruit, with fine drinkability. Designed to go with food.	13.5%	2013–2017	£8.69	Cockburn and Campbell
Canepa, Reserva Privada Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	15.25 (84)	14.5	16	15	Figgy dark fruit with soy notes on the nose. Dense but smooth palate, with an easy-going refreshing finish showing minty notes.	13.5%	2013–2015	£9.95–£10.95	D Byrne & Co, Seckford
Carmen, Winemaker's Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon Blend 2008	15.25 (84)	14.5	16.5	15	Dried fig fruit, warm earth and roast herbs. Juicy, herbal, spicy. Tannins are strong enough to support the weight of the fruit. Warmth of alcohol on finish.	14.2%	2013–2016	N/A UK	www.carmen.com
Concha y Toro, Don Melchor Cabernet Sauvignon, Puente Alto 2008	15.25 (84)	16	14.5	15	Restrained nose with some bloody, dark fruit emerging. The body feels grand and complete, with soft and round tannins and sweet notes towards the finish.	14.5%	2013–2016	£45	Roberson
Nuevo Mundo, Cabernet Sauvignon-Carmenere 2011	15.25 (84)	15	14.5	16	Hints of tobacco and juicy red fruit with notes of spices and herbs. Very sweet palate which the Carmenere dominates.	13.5%	2013–2017	£11	Vintage Roots, Whole Foods
San Pedro, 1865 Single Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2011	15.25 (84)	14.5	14.5	17	Creamy, caramel, roasted dark fruit. Cedary fruit character. The palate is powerful, yet elegant, with pungent tannins and very well integrated acidity.	14.5%	2013–2020	N/A UK	www.sanpedro.cl

Recommended (continued) 15-16.75pts (83-89pts)

Wine	Score	TM	PR	PT	Tasting note	Alc	Drink	Price	Stockists
Viña Casablanca, Cefiro Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	15.25 (84)	15	16.5	14.5	Definite Cabernet territory here with its brooding tobacco and leafy, herbal freshness. Easy to like and drink.	13.5%	2013-2014	£8.50	James Nicholson
William Fèvre Chile, Chacai, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2010	15.25 (84)	15	16	15	Complex, creamy, heady and coffeeed. The Cabernet delivers structure and length while Carmenera offers herbal notes and mellow texture.	13.9%	2013-2017	£19.99	Berry Bros & Rudd
Cousiño-Macul, Finis Terrae 2009	15 (83)	16	16	13	Nicely resolving tannins, fine texture, dried fruit and herbs. Pretty good for the vintage. Ripe, yet has balancing freshness for a 2009.	14%	2013-2017	£14.99	Hawkshead Wines, Hedonism
De Martino, Legado Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2011	15 (83)	14	15	16	Deep, malty and brooding. This is a softer version of a cool vintage. Perhaps lacks a bit of mid-palate length and the finish is a touch dry.	13.5%	2013-2015	£8.25-£10.99	Les Caves de Pyrène, The Wine Society
Haras de Pirque, Elegance Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2007	15 (83)	15.5	15	14.5	Evolving nose with some coffee-grounds aromas. The fruit on the plummy palate is dominated by sweet spicy notes within a big strong body.	15%	2013-2016	£22.40	Berkmann, Hailsham Cellars, Harrods
Santa Carolina, Reserva de Familia Cabernet Sauvignon 2010	15 (83)	15	14	16	Very ripe, muscular and firm with plenty of black fruit. Medium weight and balanced, if a little gritty.	14.5%	2013-2016	N/A UK	www.santacarolina.cl
Santa Carolina, VSC 2008	15 (83)	15	16	14	Dried fruit, tobacco and coffee grounds on the nose. Plummy, big palate which is quite evolved in a good way, and showing nice texture.	14.5%	2013-2015	N/A UK	www.santacarolina.cl
Santa Rita, Casa Real, Reserva Especial Cabernet Sauvignon 2009	15 (83)	15.5	15	14.5	Pleasant cassis on the nose, this is ripe, glossy, dark. You can feel the heat of the vintage - the body is massive and round, with soft, voluptuous tannins.	14.5%	2013-2015	£35	Laithwaites, Majestic, The Wine Society
TerraMater, Limited Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, Isla de Maipo 2010	15 (83)	14.5	16	14.5	Rich, ripe. Softer, fuller Isla de Maipo style. Lacks tension of the best Alto Maipo styles, but with enough acidity to keep up the freshness.	14.5%	2013-2017	£12.49	Cockburn & Campbell
Viña Maipo, Protegido Cabernet Sauvignon, Buin 2009	15 (83)	15	15	15	Quite soft, open textured with some supporting tannins. Generous in tobacco, eucalyptus and dry cherry flavours, with warming alcohol on the finish.	14.5%	2013-2018	N/A UK	www.vinamaipo.com

Fair 13-14.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Carmen, Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2010 14.75 (82) ■ Echeverria, Founder's Selection, Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 14.75 (82) ■ Inspira, Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Morandé, Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 14.75 (82) ■ Odfjell Vineyards, Armador, Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 14.75 (82) ■ Santa Alicia, Millantu 2008 14.75 (82) ■ Santa Rita, Medalla Real, Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 14.75 (82) ■ Tres Palacios, Cholqui, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 14.75 (82) ■ Undurraga, Altazor 2009 14.75 (82) ■ Undurraga, Founder's Collection, Cabernet Sauvignon 2008 14.75 (82) ■ Viña Mar, Reserva Especial, Cabernet Sauvignon

2010 14.75 (82) ■ Indómita, Zardoz 2010 14.5 (81) ■ Ventisquero, Grey, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 14.5 (81) ■ Echeverria, Limited Edition, Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 14.25 (80+) ■ Emiliana, Signos de Origen, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Haras de Pirque, Equus, Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Nativa, Single Vineyard Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 14.25 (80+) ■ Tarapacá, Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 14.25 (80+) ■ Viña Casablanca, Nimbus Single Vineyard, Cabernet Sauvignon 2009 14.25 (80+) ■ Viña Maipo, Vitral, Cabernet Sauvignon 2011 14.25 (80+) ■ Cousiño-Macul, Antiguas Reservas, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 14 (80) ■ Tarapacá, Etiqueta Negra Gran Reserva, Cabernet

Sauvignon 2010 14 (80) ■ Emiliana, Novas Gran Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon-Merlot 2010 13.75 (79) ■ Geo Wines, Chono Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 13.75 (79) ■ Santa Rita, Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 13.25 (77)

Poor 11-12.75pts (76-82pts)

■ Garage Wine Co, Lot #30, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2010 12.75 (75+) ■ Odfjell Vineyards, Orzada, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 12.75 (75+) ■ Aquitania, Reserva, Cabernet Sauvignon 2010 12 (73)

For full UK stockist details, see p102

Expert summary: Peter Richards MW

We found refreshment value in the recent vintages. Although they were cooler years, it would be nice to think that this was also a deliberate shift in style by winemakers



Peter Richards MW is the author of *The Wines of Chile* (Mitchell Beazley) and the Regional Chair for Chile at the Decanter World Wine Awards

MAIPO CABERNET CAN be excellent - but it suffers from a number of afflictions. This tasting was a window into that stark reality. Two Outstanding wines shone through, both from quality terroirs in Alto Maipo (Pirque and Puente Alto) and from relatively cool vintages (2010 and 2011). The key features that impressed us with these wines was a lightness of touch, and a refreshment value allied to an innate complexity, which spoke of both place and variety in an elegant not overstated fashion.

This was crucial. Too many wines, especially from a warmer vintage, had been overcooked (be it by viticulturists or winemakers). For Cabernet to sing in Maipo, it needs freshness and levity as well as substance and profundity. Missed opportunities abounded.

Refreshment value was to be found more in the recent vintages (2011 and 2010) than in the other years with significant representation here - 2009 and 2008. This is partly climatic - the latter two were warmer vintages - but it would be nice to think it's also a result of winemakers making a conscious decision to promote refreshment value (brains) over ripeness and extraction (brawn). We found much to like in these fresher styles, though it was clear that some wines were simply insubstantial in this context.

Price and reputation is little guarantee of quality, to go

by the results here. The good news is that, for many of these big hitters, the problems are not irremediable. Most were marked down not because of what they were lacking but because they were simply overdone: admirable but ultimately undrinkable, with their sheer intensity of glossy fruit, forceful structures and mule-like alcoholic kicks.

The inherent variability of Maipo Cab was reflected in the oddly apportioned results: two Outstanding but only one Highly Recommended, then 35 Recommended. This was partly due to disparities in individual scores, but the fact that only just over half (57%) were rated as Recommended or above reflects a broader reality that Maipo Cabernet needs to be more consistent - and consistently better. This is a category that is a standard bearer for Chilean wine and it needs to shift up a gear. Greater focus on site and drinkability would be good starting points. **D**

'This category is a standard bearer for Chilean wine and it needs to shift up a gear'

My top three

Toby Morrhall

■ Concha y Toro, Terrunyo Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2009

Concha y Toro has some of the greatest holdings of vineyards in the best parts of the Upper Maipo. These 2009s performed well in a hot year, this one partly due to the early-picked fruit, which has greater aromatic intensity and less alcohol than grapes picked later. **16/20pts (86/100pts)** Drink 2013-2019

■ Cono Sur, 20 Barrels Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2009

From part of the same stable as the Terrunyo (above) this is one of Cono Sur's best 20 Barrels Cabernets. **16.5 (88)** Drink 2013-2018

■ Santa Rita, Casa Real Reserva Especial Cabernet Sauvignon 2009

I am very fond of this wine, from lower-altitude vineyards at Alto Jahuel - Población was planted in 1973 and Carneros in 1962. After a very low-extraction vinification and maturation in high-quality French oak, the result is an understated wine which matures well in bottle. **15.5 (85)** Drink 2013-2015

My top three

Peter Richards MW

■ Pérez Cruz, Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2011

A brilliant marriage of finesse and upbeat character, and great value at under a tenner. Engaging notes of mint and roasted herbs come together with plummy flavours. Juicy, refreshing, rewarding stuff. **17/20pts (90/100pts)** Drink 2013-2019

■ Aquitania, Lazuli Cabernet Sauvignon 2004

Proof, among other examples, that Chile does make eminently age-worthy Cabernet. Ferruginous and firm, savoury and tobacco-scented, this bottle is fine, mature, gastronomic stuff. **17 (90)** Drink 2013-2016

■ Viña Casablanca, Cefiro Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2011

Worth singling out as one of the cheaper wines in the tasting that still delivers vibrant Cabernet character in a fresh, uplifting and deftly made style. Excellent value. **16.5 (88)** Drink 2013-2014

My top three

Patricio Tapia

■ Quebrada de Macul, Domus Aurea Cabernet Sauvignon, Alto Maipo 2009

Even in a warm vintage such as 2009, this favourite, filled with mint and herbal aromas, softened by the weight of alcohol, but moderated by a pungent acidity, shows its character with elegance and grace. **16/20pts (86/100pts)** Drink 2013-2018

■ De Martino, Single Vineyard Las Aguilas Cabernet Sauvignon 2010

From the almost unknown coastal Maipo area, it seems easy and simple to drink at first, then evolves in complexity as the tannins emerge, together with a crispy and lively acidity. **17 (90)** Drink 2013-2017

■ Undurraga, TH Cabernet Sauvignon, Pirque, Alto Maipo 2011

Pirque, high and cool, usually gives Cabernets dominated by austerity and strength, such as this one, where the bright red fruit flavours feel like decoration vis-à-vis its solid structure of tannins. **18.5 (95)** Drink 2013-2020

NB: the tasters' top wines are not necessarily their top-scoring, rather those that, on learning the wines' identity, they feel are the most notable given their provenance, price or other factors

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