

# WINE News

*Reaching the peaks of South American Wines*



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## Reframing the Conversation About World-Class Wines

By Kirk Walker



We live in something of a wine bubble in the U.S., especially those of us in California, with relatively easy access to the best wines from all over the world. We are incredibly lucky. “Best Wine,” however, is a broad and crowded category, with most of the attention usually going to blue-chip European wines and the cult producers from the Western United States. But, increasingly, you

can find inspired, stand-out wines from every corner of the winemaking world—even if some of these may get lost in the shuffle.

Take South America: often synonymous with value, some shoppers may skip the South American aisle when looking for more serious

wines. But this would be a mistake! True: their wines represent value; the economics are in our favor. But they are not just value wines. Collectively, South American winemakers have been increasing their knowledge by drinking the great wines, studying terroir, and sharing their expertise across the winemaking community. And the current wines being produced from these regions are outstanding.

For this week’s newsletter, I’d like to shine a light on the array of wonderful wines from Chile and Argentina, from the heavy-hitting collectibles to the everyday drinkers that way overdeliver, even when you compare them in their price class to other regions around the world (like the list below). I want to show you that the wines from South America can compete in the same weight class as some of the world-class big names, while providing both unbelievable value and incredible bona fides. I want to show you the South American wines you should be drinking tonight!

## The South American Wine Primer

Consider this your South American wine guide. Each bottle way overdelivers!

**2017 Familia Zuccardi “Finca Piedra Infinita” Paraje Altamira \$149.99 98WA 97JS 96VN**

**2017 Catena Zapata “Nicolás Catena Zapata” Bordeaux Blend Mendoza \$89.99 95WA 97JS**

**2019 Catena Zapata “White Bones - Adrianna Vineyard” Chardonnay Mendoza \$124.99 99WA 95VN 97JS**

**2017 Viña Quebrada de Macul “Domus Aurea” Cabernet Sauvignon Maipo Valley \$54.99 95WA**

**2019 Seña Red Blend Valle de Aconcagua \$129.99 96VN 98WA 98JS 96DC**

**2017 El Enemigo “Gran Enemigo - Gualtallary” Cabernet Franc Mendoza \$89.99 98WA 97JS 95VN**

**2019 Bodega Chacra “Treinta y Dos” Pinot Noir Patagonia \$104.99 98JS**

**2018 Catena Zapata “River Stones - Adrianna Vineyard” Malbec Mendoza \$189.99 100JS 99WA 95VN**

**2018 Clos Apalta Bordeaux Blend Colchagua Valley \$119.99 98JS 97DC 96WA**

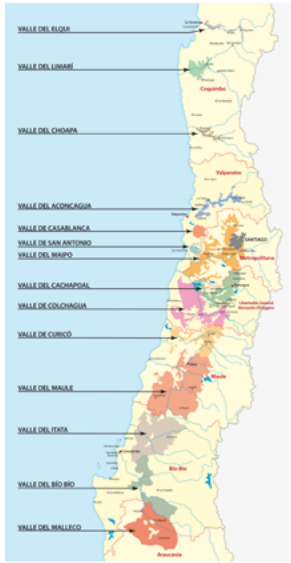
**2018 Cheval des Andes Bordeaux Blend Mendoza \$89.99 (due June 2022) 98WA 98JS 96VN**



*Nicolás Catena Zapata and daughter Laura Catena helped put Argentina on the wine map.*

# This Could Be Garage Wine Co.'s Breakout Moment

*Tasting Garage Wine Co. wines is always an exciting moment, as the wines have strong personalities and are among the best produced in Chile. — Luis Gutiérrez, Wine Advocate*



*Most of the wines made by Garage Wine Co. are sourced from the Secano Interior in Maule and Itata, roughly three hours south of Santiago and two hours north of Concepcion.*

**Garage Wine Company is one of my favorite wineries in Chile,** and its punk-rock ethos makes me think of Fugazi, one of the most important American punk bands. What do they have in common? Let me explain: Fugazi was famous for their Do-It-Yourself ethos. From the get-go, they were about creating music their own way and building a community around them. They did almost everything themselves or with help from their community: from recording to marketing, booking, touring, and packaging their merch. This was not only because they were small and lacked resources, but because they wanted their people to grow and succeed with them. This approach gave them more control and helped them start a whole movement in music.

At its core, Garage Wine Co. is just as DIY and community centric. It started off as a hobby, literally in owners Pilar and Derek's garage—they were making wine for themselves and selling a bit to family and friends to help pay for the next harvest. They slowly gained the attention of the local press and needed a name: hence Garage Wine Co.—what else? As they garnered more attention, they had the ability to grow, but they didn't have the means for new equipment. So, in true DIY fashion, they reached out to their community, and, with their help, built out the winery's fermentation and storage tanks. Since the beginning, they have honored that DIY ethic. Instead of buying wax capsules in quantities designed for large-production wineries, they found a local school-supply company to make their wax. They learned to silkscreen bottles instead of buying paper labels. The silk-screened labels look great, and only came about because they eschewed the one-size-fits-all label industry. They bought recycled or scheduled-to-be-recycled bottles. All these steps make me like them even more, but the truth is, I would not be talking about them if the wines weren't special.

Pilar and Derek make their wine in small batches from single vineyards with native-yeast fermentations and minimal intervention. They only work with small, independent farmers in their community who are committed to farming without any synthetic chemicals. Most of these vineyards comprise old, dry-farmed, bush vines with plantings going back to the 1930s. Their support allows organic farmers in their community to make a better living.

Their production revolves around Carignan, a grape that was widely



planted in the 1930s as a way of adding color, tannin, and acidity to the wines of the time. Farmers soon learned that Carignan thrived here, and thus it found its spiritual home. Warm, sunny days, balanced by cool coastal breezes and clay-based soils with granite and schist—perfect components for dry-farmed Carignan.

The star of their lineup is their Vigno bottling. Vigno is a grower's organization that brought attention to the old Carignan vineyards in the cool-climate Secano Interior. Garage Wine Co. was one of the founding members, and their expression is always at the top of the class. **2018 Garage Wine Co. "Vigno" Carignane Maule Valley**

**\$59.99 99WA** is a showstopper. Mostly Carignan with a splash of País and Mourvèdre, it is intense: the color, the aromatics, and the flavors. Reminiscent of Priorat, it shows notes of plums, mixed berries, pluots, flowers, stones, and spice. Eighteen months in used oak softens the wine. The finish is very, very long with lingering fresh fruit, floral, herbal, mineral tones, and mouthwatering acidity. It makes you crave another sip. This is a wine with incredible aging potential. It's delicious now but will surprise and delight for a long, long time.



The next wine is the **2018 Garage Wine Co. "Lot 97 - Truquilemu Vineyard" Carignan Maule Valley \$44.99 98WA**. This is from a single parcel at Truquilemu, but higher up with slightly lower yields than the Vigno. There is a little Syrah planted here, and that may account for the wine's darker color. It's beautiful, with an electricity to the mixed red berries, floral lift, and savory herbal tones. This wine has a very similar drive to the Vigno, and that must be attributed to the Carignan from this site. The nose and palate are exuberant, but it needs a little more time to open up. When it does, it shows layers of fruit, fruit skin, flowers, spice, herbs, and stones. The acidic core of this is mouthwatering and draws the finish out, with an interplay between the fresh and savory qualities of the wine.

What resonates with me about both the band Fugazi and this small Chilean winery is that, for so many people in similar start-up situations, all the decisions that they'd make would have been calculated to drive sales. This is not who Garage Wine Co. is, nor is it how they create their art. The same can be said for Fugazi. I do not know how either of these parties will feel about this comparison, but I do know that the connections and the stories that we build around things help us to understand them on a deeper level. This feels right to me. And so do the wines.

## Kirk's Andean Hit Parade

### *Kaiken*

Kaiken is the Argentine project of Arelio Montes, one of the most successful enologists and wine personalities in Chile. Not satisfied with just expanding the horizons of Chilean winemaking, he looked to the other side of the Andes decades ago. The Indómito line is his newest offering. The **2019 Kaiken "Indómito" Malbec Altamira \$17.99** is a hedonistic Malbec. The fruit comes from limestone-rich soil at almost 4000 feet. Fermented and aged in concrete, this has an old school-Malbec feel, but is cleaner, fresher, and more aromatic. Cherries, bramble fruits, violets, herbs, and a dusty minerality. Juicy, round, easy to drink—and seriously delicious!



### *Caliterra*

Caliterra encapsulates modern Chilean wine. It was created by Robert Mondavi and Viña Errazuriz to showcase the the Colchagua Valley and bring Chile's wines to a wider audience. **2017 Caliterra "Edición Limitada A" Colchagua \$19.99** is their reserve wine, crafted to express the terroir of the Andes. It is first and foremost a mountain wine, with the energy and structure that only comes from high elevation. Bright and aromatic, the blend of Carménère and Malbec provides a magenta-like fruit tone, accentuated with floral and savory elements, oak spice, and a hint of that classic Chilean greenness. The palate is full bodied and sleek, aided by dusty, fine tannins that glide. Bright sappy fruit, spice, a volcanic minerality, and a savory twist—ideal for the grill.



### *Koyle*

**2020 Koyle "Costa La Flor" Sauvignon Blanc San Antonio Valley \$12.99** is a cool drink on a warm night at a Mexican beach resort. Very specific image, I know! But this wine 100% takes me back to Punta Mita, with a refreshing greenness that comes from the plants starting to respire after the day's heat. I love it. Made with organic grapes from the granitic soils of the cool, coastal San Antonio Valley—ideal terroir for Sauv Blanc. Juicy, crisp, and flavorful: chilled guava with citrus zest, especially grapefruit. Crisp but not tart. It has a subtle salty-mineral thing that also summons memories of vacation. It is super food friendly—pair with ceviche!



### *Catena*

I am on the record many times about how much I love the Catena Appellation series. The wines are delicious, and they also teach us about the terroir of Mendoza. The **2020 Catena "White Clay" White Lujan de Cuyo \$21.99** is the first from this series that speaks specifically to the white clay soils of Lujan de Cuyo. The blend—60% Sémillon and 40% Chenin Blanc—is historic, as these were some of the first white varieties to be planted on a larger scale in Argentina, and they have become a common blend. The core here is the Sémillon, which provides a linear structure, while the Chenin opens the aromatics, adds a



ripeness and depth to the fruit, and softens the assertiveness of the Sémillon. This is a crisp white with weight and texture, but not heavy or oaky. A floral quantity and pithiness play with a subtle mineral herbal note. This is a dinner wine with endless possibilities.

Cabernet Franc is a rising star in Mendoza, and there has been quite a lot planted in the last decades. The **2018 Catena Cabernet Franc San Carlos \$19.99** shows us why. It is aromatic, with a subtle floral lift balancing its dark red fruits, backed by the classic herbaceousness of Cabernet Franc. The wine is medium bodied with a modest amount of very polished tannins. You can tell that this was made by someone accustomed to working with Malbec. The fruit is pure and framed with very little new oak. It is charming, with depth and complexity.



### *Familia Zuccardi*

Familia Zuccardi makes some of the most exciting wines in Argentina. Sebastian Zuccardi saw the potential in the highest parts of the Uco Valley and built his winery there. The **2019 Familia Zuccardi "Poligonos" Malbec Paraje Altamira \$25.99** is vibrant, pure, and aromatic: red berries, a floral component, and a subtle, bright, herbal lift. There is a suggestion of something darker, richer, and riper. It wows on the palate—luxurious with dark berries and very fine, almost chalky tannins. The fruit has great depth, from dark berries to red fruits, pulled by mouthwatering acidity. The finish is lifted with delicate minerality and herbs. This is a serious wine that is so tasty it will take a great deal of self control—or several bottles—to drink slowly enough to fully understand its depths.



### *Chakana*

There is something very fresh about the **2019 Chakana "Estate Selection" Malbec Mendoza \$21.99**—garden fresh. The nose has the perfect blend of dark ripe fruit and vivid herbal and soil components. You will find just a hint of Malbec's signature violet lift. Blended from their estate vineyards in the Paraje Altamira, Gultallary, and Chacayes regions. Organically grown, fermented with native yeast, then aged in French oak and concrete. On the palate this wine speaks to its high-elevation birthplace: it is bright with ripe plums, brambly berries, and violets. The tannins are fine with a subtle chalkiness. It's a lot of fun! It starts a little restrained then relaxes and becomes the life of the party.



### *Bodegas Aleanna*

When I learned of the existence of **2017 Bodegas Aleanna "El Enemigo" Syrah-Viognier Mendoza \$23.99**, I had to buy it sight unseen (and untasted). Everything that this winery makes is amazing. This bottle, too: cofermented Syrah and Viognier grown at high elevation (4000+ feet); the Syrah planted in sandy soils and the Viognier in limestone. It is aged in a 100-year-old foudre. Bright and energetic, with unmistakable Syrah aromatics. But it's the palate that stops the show. It is deep, effortless and sleek. It has a polish that wines that spend time in the best new French oak never obtain. Wow. All of that for under \$25!





## Chile's Kingston Family Wines Will Make You a Believer

The modern Chilean wine industry has had a similar trajectory to that of California's wine industry. In the 1990s, both countries began to plant vineyards in cooler coastal areas. In California, this meant the Sonoma and Central Coasts. In Chile it meant Leyda, San Antonio, and the Casablanca Valleys. The cold coastal waters and morning fog in both places create ideal environments for cool-climate varietals.

Likewise, it was in the 1990s and in California where the seeds of Chile's Kingston Family Vineyards started to germinate. While in graduate school at Stanford, Courtney Kingston developed a plan to plant vines on her family's property in the Casablanca



Valley. Inspired by what was happening on California's coast, Kingston planted Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, and Syrah in what was then Sauvignon Blanc Country. In fact, the Kingstons were the first to plant Pinot in the region, and achieved *almost* overnight success (it's the wine industry so nothing is overnight). They quickly made a name for themselves.

In the last several years they have been making changes in both the vineyards and the winery. The biggest is that they converted to organic viticulture, getting officially certified in 2020. This coincided with the decision to use more restraint in their winemaking, e.g., more neutral oak, concrete eggs, native-yeast fermentations, and minimal sulfur additions. As a result, this year's releases are the best that we have tasted.

I am about to make a very controversial statement: the best value Pinot Noirs in the world, right now, come from the Southern Hemisphere. I really like New Zealand wines but—and I am biased—Chile delivers the best, truest varietal expressions for the dollar. Here's the perfect exemplar: **2018 Kingston Family "Tobiano" Pinot Noir \$19.99**. What a beautiful Pinot—and that is not an adjective that normally gets attached

to Pinot at this price point. It is a medium-bodied wine at a refreshing 12% alcohol. The aromatics are bright, with berries, spice, and crushed herbs. With fine tannins, it's a delicate wine with surprising persistence.

I am happy to put the **2019 Kingston Family "Alazan" Pinot Noir \$39.99** up against any other New World Pinot at a similar price point. It will make you a believer in Chilean Pinot Noir. It achieves the trifecta of concentration, balance, and restraint. There is deft winemaking here and well-integrated French oak. With wonderful focus, the core of the wine is dark cherry, plus notes of forest floor, sweet spice, and herbs. It has very good concentration but comes off elegantly, with soft polished tannins, subtle acidity, and a lingering finish.

The biggest surprise, and it shouldn't be, is the **2019 Kingston Family "Lucero" Syrah \$23.99**. The cool, dry climate and sandy soils of the Casablanca Valley are perfect for the grape. The wine's aromatics show mixed berries, with characteristic bacon-fat and smoke as well as black pepper and herbs. A perfect introduction to Syrah, with balanced sweet and savory aromatics. On the palate it does what I love about Chilean wines: it shows rich fruit and layers of spice, then leads to a clean dry finish with enough tannin and acid to leave you wanting another sip.



**2020 Kingston Family "Cariblanco" Sauvignon Blanc \$21.99** is a special wine, sharing more in common with Sancerre than Marlborough. The organic viticulture and the skillful mix of concrete and used oak have elevated this wine. It does so many things at once, but what it is not is round and flamboyantly fruity. It is ripe, cool, and concentrated with citrus, cool white fruit, clean green notes, and flinty minerality. There is good texture and mouthwatering acidity.

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