

Ireland's Love Affair With Chilean Wine



Wine writer Raymond Blake tackles the quandary as to why our love affair with Chilean wine is only equal to a bargain buy and if new developments of a more premium kind might tempt our palates, and pockets.

Ireland's love affair with Chilean wine knows no bounds. Or does it? "Fine for a drinks party, not for a dinner party," might best sum up our attitude; we lap them up on a daily basis, loading bottle after bottle into our supermarket trolleys, but when we want something 'special' we tend to look elsewhere. We focus on Chile when a well-made bargain that delivers a rush of clean fruit flavours is needed, but when we go in search of something more nuanced and complex our gaze turns back to Europe. Which leaves the Chilean winemakers in a Catch-22 situation: delighted with their rampant success on these shores, but perplexed at their inability to encourage their fans to trade up. Is there a glass ceiling?

Very possibly. On a recent visit to Chile, one that took in a host of wineries, tastings and, above all, long discussions with winemakers and other figures in the wine trade, one question, asked in a dozen different ways, became the mantra for my visit: “What can we do to get Irish wine drinkers to trade up to our premium wines?”

Initially, I struggled for an answer, but gradually I formulated a response which ran something like this: Be prepared to move away from the high-volume, safe commercial option and take a bold step towards producing wines of greater distinction, always aware of the risks such a strategy holds. Some consumers may be lost on the climb up the quality ladder, but that risk can be minimised by well-thought-out communication and promotion.

I am delighted to note that some have already taken the bold step – it’s just that the message has failed to get through so far. The producers listed below are amongst them. Many of their wines are already well known in Ireland. Others, often with more character, are not. It is time to seek them out.

VIK

Money talks at Vik, from the long, low-slung winery to the nearby luxury hotel, clad in billowing titanium panels, where each room is individually themed. The wines reflect the no-expense-spared approach, replete as they are with dense, concentrated fruit flavours and a surfeit of oak. These are full throttle wines.

