

Viña Vik

Millahue, Chile

A PLACE
OF GOLD

VIÑA VIK

Estoril 50, Of. 609
Las Condes
Santiago, Chile 7591047
+56-222-482218
www.vik.cl

HACIENDA VIK

Millahue
San Vicente de Tagua
Tagua
Santiago de Chile, Chile
+56-995-349437



BENJAMIN T. WEINBERG



Cactus-lined vineyards at Viña Vik in Millahue.

Viña Vik is roughly 125 miles from Santiago on the remote north slope of Chile's Apalta Valley, also known as the "Place of Gold." Norwegian entrepreneur Alexander Vik launched the project in 2004 after conducting pilot soil studies all over South America. In 2006, he decided to buy 10,700 acres in Apalta; to date, he has planted about 950 to Cabernet Sauvignon, Carménère, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, and Syrah.

As his CEO, Vik brought in Patrick Valette, who had been an owner of Château Pavie in St. Émilion and, since 1995, had been consulting for wineries all over Chile—including Domus Aurea, Neyen, and J. Bouchon. Valette recruited Gonzague de Lambert, with whom he had worked in St. Émilion and Chile, as vice president of sales and marketing;

Cristián Vallejos, a Chilean with experience in France, Italy, Spain, and California, as enologist; and Pedro Veas, a Chilean with a background in environmental law, as legal administrator.

Vik produces only one wine by a process based on holistic principles, combining the most advanced viticultural and vinicultural practices with environmental stewardship, the ethical development of human and social capital, and esthetic considerations. One manifestation was a

Apalta Valley panorama.



OUTSTANDING RECENT RELEASES

2009 **\$150**

63% Carménère, 35% Cabernet Sauvignon, 1.5% Cabernet Franc, 0.2% Merlot, 0.3% Syrah. Aromas are of freshly picked red orchard fruits, forest blackberry and blueberry, and hints of ripe plum, almonds, and walnuts. The structure is pleasant, with round tannins and fine persistence; the palate is oily and generous. This smooth, balanced wine has the potential for long-term aging but can be enjoyed now.

2010 **\$130**

56% Cabernet Sauvignon, 32% Carménère, 5% Cabernet Franc, 4% Merlot, 3% Syrah. On the nose, this deep purple-red bottling is quite fresh, leaning toward ripe red cherry and blueberry. Dark-fruit flavors explode from the glass; milk chocolate and graphite round out the moderately acidic yet ripe, rich, and long finish. The result is concentrated but soft and elegant, full of polished tannins.

2011 **\$100**

This vintage was still being blended on my visit. The sample I tasted had plenty of fruit yet remained elegant on the nose. After 23 months in new oak barrels, it had developed a soft mouthfeel; a high percentage of Cabernet Sauvignon provided structure and backbone, while the other components allowed plenty of charm to peek through, promising exceptional harmony among tannins, polyphenols, fruit, and alcohol.

*Certified sommelier and **unfilteredunfined.com** editor-in-chief Ben Weinberg, JD, MBA, pens Weinberg's Wine Notes and writes for The World of Fine Wine, Wine Enthusiast, and The Tasting Panel Magazine as well as Sommelier Journal. He also leads luxurious, behind-the-scenes tours of the world's most famous wine regions via **wineontheroad.com**.*



Viña Vik guest lodge.

winery-design competition among some of Chile's best architects, won by the renowned Smiljan Radic, who completed the facility in 2008. A 22-room hotel will open in November, offering wine and nature lovers a comfortable sojourn in this isolated area. "Each room was decorated by a contemporary Chilean artist," says de Lambert, "and the best plan would be to spend at least two nights to enjoy everything we offer—winery, vineyard, spa, restaurant, and the land itself. Our goal is to be in the band at the concert of the best winery-based experiences in the world."

Biodiversity is another important component of the Vik philosophy, especially considering the geographical isolation of its vineyards. Four of the blocks are managed sustainably, and the estate has maintained a negative carbon footprint by planting nearly 600 trees. A water-treatment plant recovers drained water and uses plants to consume bacteria; other green measures in the winery include the use of free cooling, natural insulation, and both solar and geothermal energy.

The estate vineyards are situated among gorges with a variety of microclimates and exposures cooled by coastal breezes. A team of more than 300 employees oversees every stage of growth and production. "Science, technology, and knowledge are our foundation," says de

Lambert, "but passion is the engine." The result is already in great demand: the inaugural 2009s have sold out, and the 2010 vintage, after a year of bottle aging, is available in 10 countries, including Chile and the United States.

As de Lambert explains, "Precision viticulture is quite innovative for Chile, but it makes a huge difference. For example, vineyards exposed to the south receive more sunshine in the morning, when bunches are still cool. They warm slowly, because night temperatures are very cold (46-54°F during the summer), and get less sunshine in the afternoon due to shade from nearby mountains. We plant Carménère and Syrah to the north, because they accept higher temperatures and extra sunlight. Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Cabernet Franc require more protection via a southern exposure."

Then there is the influence of wind: "Breezes from the Pacific arrive at noon every day," de Lambert reports. "Depending on the valley size and exposition, their power impacts vineyard temperature." Finally, we get to the soil. Where there's more clay, the soil humidity is greater; where sand dominates, more irrigation is needed. Loose stones also influence soil temperatures. "We were very interested to identify each type of soil, because we wanted to plant 96% of this vineyard with rootstock," says Valette. "There are 12 small valleys where we produce our grapes. We did 6,000 soil analyses to identify distinct blocks and to choose the family of rootstock and the variety of grape we would plant in each one."



Guest lodge (left); CEO Patrick Valette (above).

Every vintage to date has been different. The inaugural 2008 growing season featured unusually high humidity after a particularly rainy winter; irrigation began later than usual, and blossoming occurred during the second half of November. “Warm weather but no rain enabled terrific fertilization levels and high crop loads,” de Lambert notes. “Cluster selection and leaf thinning created air tunnels that put more light on the grapes and allowed better maturation.”

After five or six days of maceration at 46°F, a month of native-yeast fermentation in 8,000-liter tanks, and seven to 15 days of post-fermentative maceration, each lot was barreled for malolactic conversion. The wines were transferred to new French-oak barrels in early June, then racked every three months. After 18 months in barrel, the final blend was gently filtered and bottled in January 2011.

Weather conditions during the winter of 2009 were much drier and cooler than usual, with about 35% less rainfall. September was also cold, and budding began a bit late. Fortunately, sunny conditions returned in the second half of December, and summer showed little variation in daytime temperatures, though the cool nights preserved freshness and concentration. Of course, the earthquake of Feb. 28, 2010, caused damage across Chile, but Vik came through with flying colors.

According to de Lambert, 2011 featured excellent balance between fresh Pacific breezes and high summer temperatures, allowing for “slow maturation, with harvest occurring from the end

of April through May.” 2012 was atypical due to high February temperatures; a lack of winter precipitation led to lower yields but intense fruit and polyphenols. It was an excellent year for Carménère, as the final blend will almost certainly reflect; at present, de Lambert says, barrel samples are showing “excellent maturation and a good balance between concentration and elegance.” As for 2013, “it has, until now, been quite strange,” he admits, citing “very special weather conditions, with a wet spring and cloudy days. We shall see.”

Vik is an artisanal producer that counters Chile’s downmarket reputation by focusing on holistic winemaking and agritourism. As Valette summarizes the approach: “This winery is based on two concepts: industrial and artisanal. When I say industrial, I mean that everything was designed with a minimalist concept so it would be easy to work, with space to do all the harvest, winemaking, bottling, and storage. When I say artisanal, I mean we think about the best way to produce the best wine: we have plenty of small tanks to trace the lots of wine and to follow the quality of each vineyard. The idea is to create a harmonious ambience with people who want to work as a team.” 🍷

Founder Alexander Vik.

