

VIK: The Premier Grand Cru of Chile

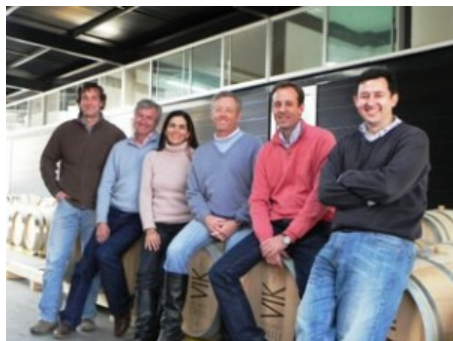
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It has struck me over recent years that there has been somewhat of a lack of effort on behalf of both the Chilean government and Chilean wineries to create a more visible Chilean wine presence in the Hong Kong market. Over a decade ago, Links Concept launched La Joya in Hong Kong and it took the market by storm with its affordability and easy drinking nature – it seemed like most of the restaurants in Soho at least were selling it anyway at the time.

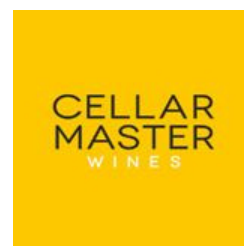
These days, Chilean wines are situated on one of two ends of the price scale; terrible, cheap, hangover inducing wines or terribly good, but not in the everyday drinking price range – which makes me wonder what happened to Chile and if other wines, more preferable to the drinker of today have taken over and Chile has, well, given up. Put it this way, one seldom sees the presence of Chile at trade fairs here like one sees the likes of Spain, Argentina and South Africa.

When I say 'not everyday drinking wines' I am talking about good wines; Sena, Alamaviva, Don Maximiano and, most recently to the Hong Kong market, a wine called VIK. The winery was founded in 2004 by Norwegian Alexander Vik with the ambition of creating a Premier Grand Cru of South America. It is situated in the Millahue Valley in the south of the country which is named the "place of gold" by the locals who love there – vines were planted in 2006.



The winery is managed by Patrick Valette, formerly of Bordeaux's Chateau Pavie and makes wine from Bordeaux varietals, vinifies in a French style and ages their wine in French oak. In essence, they are making a Bordeaux style of wine in the south of Chile. But what differentiates the wine from Bordeaux is that the wines are vibrant and fresh, approachable when young and still have the capability for aging (or so I am told – they've only made two vintages thus far so there is no real way of telling as yet). But having tried them there certainly is the potential for at least a decade of aging and Patrick thinks that if one gives the wine 5 to 6 years the patient drinker will begin to see how the wines have developed and opened up.

"We are not trying to emulate French wine", he tells me as we taste both the 2009 and 2010 together over lunch last week. "We want to make wine in a more approachable and elegant drinking style. We are not making a typical Chilean wine; we are creating a new concept".





Patrick himself was born in Chile and decided, upon taking on the project to move him and his family back to the country of his birth to make a success of VIK, a winery and vineyard that has seen some substantial investment from its Norwegian owner. The scale of the project is by no means small; they have over 10,000 acres spread over 12 valleys and have the capacity to make a lot more wine than they currently do (they sell a substantial amount of their harvest fruit so as to make sure their investment is not completely tied up in stock wines that need selling). Grapes grown on the site are, as expected Carmenera, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc and Merlot, with a small percentage of Syrah too. Each vintage thus far is a different blend with the 2009 being Cabernet Sauvignon dominant and the 2010 being more Carmenera dominant. It all depends on the ripening and how the varietals look at both harvest and, when the time comes, blending.

It must be said that the wines are drunk extremely well, with the 2009 Cabernet dominated vintage a more masculine one that would be best served over dinner with a nice piece of meat; while the 2010 Carmenera dominated vintage is more feminine and opulent, certainly drinkable today and more a mix of old and new world styles of wine. Honestly, I really enjoyed both the vintages but sadly only the 2010 is available in Hong Kong.



It would take a patient person to be able to cellar these wines as they are so approachable right now – but it would be worthwhile to do so, if for nothing else but to see for yourself how the wines develop. VIK wines are priced in the same region as Sena and Almaviva so, as aforementioned, they're not wines for everyday, but they are certainly wines that are worth visiting and holding on to.

VIK is imported and distributed in Hong Kong by Kerry Wines. For more information you can visit their website http://www.kerrywines.com/wine_list/index/country/Chile//?order=wine_winery&dir=ASC&p=2 or you can contact them by email on info@kerrywines.com





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