

Sauvignon Blanc

Chile

The Chilean wine community has made a beeline for the Pacific coast in search of cooler sites, and if pure, racy Sauvignon Blanc is your bag, then you should too. Whether it's Leyda, Casablanca or coastal Colchagua, Sauvignon Blanc's fragrance and freshness is preserved by the cooling influence of the Humboldt Current, which brings cold water – and cold air – north from the South Pacific along the Chilean coastline.

This country's romance with Sauvignon Blanc is even more recent than New Zealand's. Most of Chile's Sauvignon was produced from the inferior variety Sauvignonasse until decent clonal material landed on its shores in the late 1980s. The first vine didn't meet Leyda's soil until 1998 but it quickly became clear that the combination of ambitious producers, quality clones and the moderating influence of morning mists and afternoon sea breezes would elevate Chilean Sauvignon Blanc.

An even more recent addition to Chile's Sauvignon stable has been Paredones, the most westerly outpost of the Colchagua wine region. This large and established region is best known for its full-bodied reds, but in 2008, when the buzz was all about Leyda, Bío Bío and Patagonia, I spent a week in Colchagua and the compass was firmly pointed westward in search of cooler sites. Casa Silva staked an early claim in Paredones about 6km from the sea and made its first wine in 2010. Johnny Bingham of Jackson Nugent Vintners, which represents Casa Silva in the UK, explains the appeal of coastal Sauvignon Blanc in Chile:



'They are powerful, salty wines, really intense, with electric lime and lemon flavours. They rage with beautiful acidity and they're very much alive.'

FIVE WINES TO TRY

Casa Silva, Cool Coast Sauvignon Blanc (*Colchagua*); Casa Silva, Lago Ranco Sauvignon Blanc (*Patagonia*); Concha y Toro, Terrunyo Sauvignon Blanc (*Casablanca*); Ventisquero, Grey Sauvignon Blanc (*Atacama*); Matetic, EQ Coastal Sauvignon Blanc (*Casablanca*)

US

It isn't the first variety that springs to mind when you think California wine, but the Golden State is the centre of US Sauvignon Blanc production and has been since it was first imported in the 1880s. Napa's revered To Kalon vineyard is home to the country's oldest Sauvignon vineyard. Planted by the late Robert Mondavi, who also gave birth to the moniker Fumé Blanc, the variety performs the role of warm-up act for a Napa winery's main event: Cabernet Sauvignon. In the warmer parts of Cabernet country, the wines are full and rich, often with oak influence, while cooler areas such as Carneros – and the even cooler climes of Anderson Valley, Russian River and Santa Cruz – provide more refreshing, citrusy styles.

THREE WINES TO TRY

Matthiasson (*Napa Valley blend*); Peter Michael, L'Après-Midi Sauvignon Blanc (*Knights Valley*); Cliff Lede, Sauvignon Blanc (*Napa Valley*) ➤