

# Napa Valley Register



Please the Palate

## Allison Levine: Please the Palate: Redefining Chilean wine

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Saying that Chilean wine equals value wine is “like sticking fingers in a wound,” explained Rodrigo Soto, president of Veramonte, Ritual, Primus and Neyen Wines. “It is the passion that we want to show. It is the strong quality of wines that need to be shown.” Chilean wines have often been labeled as inexpensive and simple, as wines that are fun to drink with their bold fruit flavors. But there are a growing number of winemakers who are focused on quality wines that represent the place they are from.



“We have not been very good ambassadors with regards to the aspect of regionality and specificity,” Soto said. “Historically what we created were brands that represented the country. These brands are stronger than the appellations they are from. But our real value is on the dramatic regional geography which is best communicated by seeing it.”

Chile is a long country that stretches more than 2,880 miles from north to south. From east to west, it is only 265 miles across. Unlike most regions where we look at climatic differences between the north and south, we have to look at Chile differently. We need to look at it from east to west. On the east side, there are the Andes Mountains which border Argentina. The foothills offer high altitudes and cool temperatures. Between the Andes to the east and the coastal range to the west is the Central Valley where it is relatively warm and dry. From the coastal range to the Pacific Ocean is the coastal region.

I had the privilege to visit Chile recently to begin to understand the regional diversity and spent a week exploring coastal regions, including the Casablanca Valley, Limari Valley and Leyda Valley. What these areas share is their proximity to the ocean and the resulting cool climate. The Coastal Range blocks the warm area from coming from the Central Valley. From the Pacific Ocean, the regions benefit from the Humboldt Current, a cold current that flows north along the coast. Morning fog followed by sunny days is typical, and there is a lot of wind. Soto best described the climate as “a Mediterranean climate with the air conditioning on.”

### Casablanca Valley

Casablanca Valley was Chile’s first coastal winemaking region. In an area known for dairies, animal grazing and farming, the Veramonte estate and winery was established on an 800-acre ranch on the edge of the Casablanca Valley in the 1990s.

Today, the estate is owned by Gonzalez Byass and the Casablanca Valley is home to approximately 50 producers and 5,500 hectares of vines, of which 1,000 acres certified organic.

Casablanca Valley runs east-west between the ocean and the coastal mountain range.

Days start with morning fog and the afternoon brings cool breezes, which are a result of the Humboldt Current blowing toward the mountains, mixing with the warm air coming from the east. Ripening periods are long. Sandy clay soils can be found in the Casablanca Valley.

