

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

Weekend Wine

A defense for the Carménère grape

BY WES MARSHALL, 7:16AM, SAT. JAN. 5, 2019

Many wine lovers can be excused for dismissing Chile's *raison d'être* red wine – the French refugee Carménère – as a thin, light, vegetal wine that tasted more like green peppers and mushrooms than berries and jam. And most of us were hard put to come up with a sufficient defense for the apparently lowly grape, the Carménère. Nonetheless, I'll try. Back in the mid-19th century, the burghers in Bordeaux decided to limit production of their local red wines to those made with six varietals: Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Malbec, Petit Verdot, and occasionally Carménère. The winemakers in Chile had some very prized old vines that had never had to withstand the infestations of vine-killing bugs that France faced. Someone who had a greater instinct for profits than historical accuracy convinced Chile's farmers that the lowly Carménère they'd been sold was really Merlot. Unfortunately, when you try to grow and harvest Carménère using Merlot methodology, the result is guaranteed to be the green pepper and mushroom goulash mentioned above.

Some of Chile's best wineries – and I count **Veramonte** in that list – decided to try to grow and harvest their Carménère in ways that made sense for the grape. The result has been an onslaught of wines that are so fruity they bear a resemblance to American Zinfandels. Veramonte is a winery that has developed a fine reputation for creating well-priced wines that are tasteful and restrained (see their always outstanding Sauvignon Blanc for a perfect representation), an approach that really pays off with Carménère.

The Veramonte Carménère (\$10) has dark fruit aromas like black berries and blueberries with just a few understated but pleasant, non-fruit aromas like leather and black pepper. It is ideal with Pastel de Choclo (a recipe worth trying) or any grilled red meat.

