



COUSIÑO-MACUL CHOOSES FINESSE

In the mid-1990s when the Cousiño family was planning to develop new vineyards and build a new winery, they first addressed the issue of wine style. As one of Chile's oldest family-owned winery, Cousiño-Macul enjoys a rich history and is also known to be a leading innovator. The options were numerous but the choice was simple.

Arturo Cousiño states, "Given our technology and expertise and blessed with our ideal grape growing climate in the Alto-Maipo", we have all the means to focus on our primary goal of making balanced, elegant wines. The exaggerated qualities of many wines on the market – over-ripe, highly extracted wines that are high in alcohol with too much oak are not the qualities that make a wine of finesse. Our goal has always been to produce world-class wines that are classic in structure and reflect our unique terroir."

RESTRAINT IN THE VINEYARDS

Matias Rivera developed Cousiño's Buin Estate vineyards from scratch. He and his winemaking team now work to preserve the quality and character of the fruit. He explains, "In order to make balanced wines, all steps of the grape growing and winemaking process must be handled with a great deal of care and restraint to avoid excesses.

Restraint in the vineyards starts by holding back water so the vines are stressed. This controlled deficit promotes root growth and is a way to reduce shoot growth and restrict yields. As a result, this "regulated deficit irrigation" can guide the vine to produce small berries with concentrated flavours. Second, we hold back the vegetation of the vines by leaf trimming so herbaceous flavours don't transfer to the wine."

Third is the green harvesting to reduce fruit load and control yields. The objective is to allow the remaining fruit to become more concentrated and to mature evenly. This too is a delicate balancing act between removing too many or too few clusters. If too many are dropped, the remaining fruit could increase sugar ahead of phenolics. As the vines continue to grow, the grapes receive all the flavour and colour compounds that the vine is storing, including sugar, acids, polyphenols and anthocyanins. The result is highly concentrated small berries that reach the height of their potential for excellent wine.

Rivera adds, "Last we use restraint by harvesting the grapes only at the peak of maturity. Because of the ideal climate of the Alto-Maipo with its warm days and cool nights, it is possible to achieve ideal ripeness with perfect acidity; and this is the goal of the vineyard team."

MODERATION IN THE CELLARS

2003 ANTIGUAS RESERVAS CHARDONNAY

Typically, during the growing season a daytime high of 90F can see the evening temperature drop to 50F. Because of this phenomenon known as the “Andes Effect”, Cousiño’s Chardonnays preserve unusually crisp acidity when the grapes are fully mature, so the resulting wine is naturally full-flavoured and structurally balanced.

At the harvest, the fully mature fruit is handled minimally and the winemaking team exercises moderation in the cellars. Continues Rivera, “In the winery, a light hand is called for at all stages to end up with a balanced wine. The vineyards give us excellent fruit and we try to accentuate that. This is where the character of our wines comes from, the fruit. It’s the product of our terroir.”

After fermentation of the 2003 was completed, the cellar team combined 55% of a barrel fermented fraction with 45% tank fermented (which added bright, assertive fruit). To further emphasize the wine’s fruit character and to retain the wine’s natural acidity, only 14% of the final blend was put through malo-lactic fermentation. This partial malo-lactic component added a subtle hint of butter. The barrel fermented fraction was aged in French oak for 7 months. This moderate use of malolactic and of oak aging results in a Chardonnay which is fresh, lively and complex. Adds Rivera: “The fruit has been enhanced, not hidden, by the cellar treatments.”

2002 FINIS TERRAE

For the Finis Terrae, the focus remains on subtlety and finesse in a wine that allows the Alto-Maipo terroir to shine through. A blend of Merlot and Cabernet Sauvignon, it is a wine created by tasting hundreds of combinations after the cellar work has been done. In 2002, the blend of 45% Merlot and 55% Cabernet was the one that showed the ideal balance of fruit, acid, tannin, alcohol and oak. It was aged for 13 months in new French oak which the winemaking team agreed was sufficient time to add complexity and character without dominating the fruit flavours.

Choosing finesse for their wine style was easy for the Cousiño family because to them wine enhances the dining experience and should not overwhelm the senses. A balanced wine will be pleasing all the way to the end of the meal.

Press Contact: Ginny Mills, Mills Media
Phone USA (707) 937-2293, e-mail: winechile@aol.com