

# CLUB ENOLOGIQUE



## Uncorking greatness

CHAMPAGNES OF THE YEAR

Cabernet beyond Bordeaux | California's new cults

Whisky goes into the stratosphere



From Sassicaia to Opus One, the past half-century has seen various fine wine 'origin' brands emerging and establishing themselves in the Cabernet firmament. But perhaps the most romantic story of all is that of Chile's Viñedo Chadwick. John Stimpfig tells the tale

# Deeply rooted



n 1942, a successful entrepreneur and wine broker by the name of Alfonso Chadwick Errázuriz bought the sprawling San José de Tocornal country estate in Maipo, on the southern outskirts of Santiago. The young businessman planned to use the estate to combine his three passions – family, wine and polo – and he soon set about building a home and raising a family with his young wife, Patricia.

As a descendant of Don Maximiano Errázuriz, founder of the eponymous Aconcagua winery back in 1870, fourth-generation Alfonso had wine in his blood. Fully aware of his new estate's propitious terroir, he began an ambitious replanting programme of the vineyard, mostly to Cabernet Sauvignon. By the 1950s, his estate-grown Fond de Cave label was setting new fine wine standards, becoming Chile's most expensive red. But not all of the estate was given over to vineyards and farming...

Alfonso had had a love of horses since childhood and was exceptionally gifted at the 'sport of kings', winning numerous polo tournaments and becoming the captain of Chile's national

team. He would go on to compete in Europe and help found Santiago's first polo club, where he twice played with Britain's late Duke of Edinburgh, Prince Philip. It therefore made sense to Alfonso to establish a polo field close to the house, on which to practise this other lifelong pursuit.

Twenty years after Alfonso's purchase of the estate, his family, business and polo career were flourishing. Yet at the same time, Chile was in increasingly dark times. In the early 1960s, the government orchestrated a series of punitive land reforms that forced Alfonso to sell off most of the estate. Many of his best vineyards were eagerly snapped up by the likes of Cousiño Macul and Concha y Toro, which still own them today.

Even worse was to come in the 1970s, following the expropriation policies of the Allende government, which stripped the family of its Aconcagua vineyards. After a tumultuous decade, Alfonso was finally able to reclaim control of the winery in 1983. He then asked his 24-year-old son, Eduardo, to join him in a bold bid to resuscitate and transform its now languished fortunes. Together, they strove to rebuild, re-invest and modernise.

Inevitably, the time came when Alfonso not only retired but was unable to ride and play polo. 'By the early 1990s, my father and our family were also living on the estate,' says Magui Chadwick, daughter of Eduardo and today the marketing director at Viñedo Chadwick. 'It was at this point that he put forward his history-making proposal. He asked my grandfather's permission to convert the polo field into a vineyard – not only to honour him but also to give the estate its fine wine destiny.'



Alfonso Chadwick Errázuriz (top and above, with the late Duke of Edinburgh) was as skilled a polo player as he was winemaker, and he split his time between both pursuits, establishing a polo field on the wine estate that served as the family home (right)







(Top left) Alfonso Chadwick's son Eduardo was recruited into the family business aged 24, to help the recovery from Chilean land reforms. Twenty years later, the Berlin tasting (left) cemented the winery's place in the fine wine world. Other accolades followed, with Chadwick Jr hosting a special event to celebrate the first 100-point scores awarded to a Chilean wine (right)



## Eduardo knew that the soil of the polo field – on the north bank of the Maipo River – was perfect for growing great Cabernet

Eduardo knew the attachment Alfonso had to this patch of land, but his long-held idea was no speculative hunch. He also knew the enormous vinous potential that lay beneath this hallowed turf. Specifically, he felt that the soil of the polo field – on the north bank of the Maipo River, at 650m altitude – was perfect for growing great Cabernet thanks to its beneficent, almost Mediterranean climate, its ancient alluvial terraces and its high-quality gravel soils. Add in the cool morning breezes gently blowing in from the nearby Andes, and the result is an exceptional terroir to compare to the Médoc, Napa or Bolgheri.

The 15ha of Cabernet vines were planted on the polo field in 1992, the year before Alfonso died. Seven years later came the debut vintage of what was to be the family's flagship wine, Viñedo Chadwick; in the same year, the family re-erected the polo goal on the site, to stand guard over the ripening grapes. Then, as now, the long-term goal was to craft a wine of finesse, elegance and distinction to rival the best in the world. Remarkably, that recognition was only just around the corner.

While many regard Alfonso as a great visionary and pioneer who kickstarted both Viña Errázuriz and the modern, export-focused Chilean wine industry, it was his son Eduardo who, over the next 40 years, would go on to surpass his father's vision.

The scene is Berlin's Ritz-Carlton hotel in 2004. Seated alongside Eduardo Chadwick on the top table are renowned wine critics René Gabriel and the late Steven Spurrier, while in front of them are ranged 40 members of the world's international fine wine press. All are eagerly awaiting the results of the blind tasting that has just taken place, with Viñedo Chadwick, Seña and Don Maximiano alongside three Super-Tuscans (Sassicaia, Solaia and Tignanello) and a trio of first-growth Bordeaux (Lafite, Latour and Margaux). To everyone's astonishment, including Eduardo's, the 2000 Viñedo Chadwick triumphs as the top wine of the tasting – in only its second vintage. 'When my father read out the result, there was a stunned silence, then a prolonged and rapturous round of applause,' says Magui.

The Berlin tasting, as it became known, delivered a staggering,

epoch-making result for Chile and Viñedo Chadwick. There was also a remarkable outcome for Seña, the Aconcagua Valley estate wine created jointly by Eduardo and Robert Mondavi in the early 1990s: the Seña 2001 and 2000 came second and fourth in Berlin. (Viñedo Chadwick is one of a number of wines within the Viñedos Familia Chadwick portfolio, which includes Seña, Las Pizarras, Kai, La Cumbre and Don Maximiano Founder's Reserve.)

The tasting was no flash in the pan – as subsequent blind tastings in various capital cities over the next decade would demonstrate. Time after time, Viñedo Chadwick (and Seña) equalled or outperformed their French and Italian counterparts, consistently finishing well up the leader board. Such status stands as a testament to Alfonso's vision and the vineyard he bequeathed. 'He was a truly remarkable man,' says Eduardo.

Despite, or because of, its early and conspicuous success, there's been no complacency at the Puente Alto site. Instead, you'll find a restlessly competitive spirit to learn and improve with each passing vintage. Consequently, there have been several

important, incremental changes in viticulture and winemaking over the past two decades. A small parcel of Petit Verdot was planted by winemaker Francisco Baettig to add more complexity, and in 2015, 6.4ha (16 acres) of Cabernet vines were replanted using massal selection.

Initially, the vineyard was planted north-south. Now, the rows have been reoriented east-west, resulting in even greater fruit definition. 'In addition, we've adjusted harvest dates, picking earlier for freshness,' says Magui Chadwick. 'The vines continue to produce better grapes as they age and mature. In the winery, we've reduced the level of new oak while increasing our use of more neutral *foudres* for ageing. Essentially, our goal is always to express the fruit and the terroir character of this amazing vineyard.'

These changes, well illustrated by the quality of recent vintages, are prompting some to suggest that Viñedo Chadwick has taken on the mantle of Chile's greatest Cabernet. Critics' ratings appear to bear this out, most notably two 100-point



For me, it is the most romantic story in the world – because of my father and grandfather. It connects our family in a profound way

– Magui Chadwick



Both daughters of Eduardo Chadwick (above) were married at the site of the former polo field (left) that now serves as a vineyard for the estate's signature wine, Viñedo Chadwick (right)

MAXIMILIANO BARROS

scores for the 2014 and 2017 from James Suckling, the first time any Chilean wine had secured a perfect score and an excuse for a celebratory event at the estate. ‘It was a special lunch for family, friends, journalists and distributors – a very happy, momentous and emotional day,’ says Magui. ‘My father gave a great speech about Alfonso, the wine and its history. But the most magical moment for me was the end of his speech, when he presented a bottle of the 2014 Viñedo Chadwick to my grandmother, Patricia. We still have it on video.’

Today, the estate is primarily a working vineyard, with the house no longer occupied by the family. Instead, the Chadwicks use it for private parties and events – both Magui and her sister Pepa were married there, with Viñedo Chadwick proudly poured for guests. ‘It’s such a unique place for all our family because it connects us in such a profound way,’ adds Magui. ‘And for me personally, it is the most romantic story in the world, because of my grandfather and father.’

Fine wine devotees can visit Viñedo Chadwick's birthplace in Puente Alto (by appointment only). There, you can see the impeccably farmed vineyard and the polo goal, standing tall as a powerful reminder of its past. The private house remains off limits, but the family has created two bespoke rooms to document the remarkable events that surround this wine: one is devoted to the life and sporting career of Alfonso, showcasing photos and memorabilia from his polo days; the other recounts and celebrates the dramatic events of the Berlin tasting that propelled Viñedo Chadwick to instant stardom and changed the trajectory of Chilean fine wine.

By anyone's standards, that's quite a statement and legacy – especially for a wine that didn't exist less than a quarter of a century ago. ‘Without question, this wine holds a special place in our family's heart because of its birthplace, how it came about and what happened at the Berlin tasting,’ says Magui. ‘It's a story that I never tire of telling.’



Viñedo Chadwick: Three to try

98

**Viñedos Familia Chadwick, Viñedo Chadwick, Puente Alto, Maipo Valley, Chile 2020**

*Drink 2023–50+*

Exquisite primary red fruits soar from the glass, with a hint of cream and cocoa powder. With its gorgeous *à point* acidity, this has lightness, tension and depth. The tannins are fine-grained, and the cassis, violet and cola-infused fruit is as delicious as it is balanced and complex. 2020 was another slightly warmer year in the Maipo. In spite of that, the picking, blending (with 3% Petit Verdot) and winemaking decisions by Francisco Baettig have resulted in a wine of sublime charm and refinement that will give immense pleasure in the short and long term. 13%

Available in fine wine merchants from December 2022

97

**Viñedos Familia Chadwick, Viñedo Chadwick, Puente Alto, Maipo Valley, Chile 2019**

*Drink 2023–50+*

Made in a more modern style, this 100% Cabernet focuses on freshness, finesse and purity, despite it being a moderately warm year in Puente Alto. An alluring nose and palate reveal bright fruits (raspberries, violets and blackcurrants), with a touch of cedar, spice and graphite. The subtle, filigree-textured tannins are as seamless as the deft oak (75% new barriques and 25% large oak *foudres*). Lively acidity and elegant mid-weight structure provide great harmony and a long, attenuated finish. Deliciously drinkable already, this will also make very old bones – if you can wait that long. Just 10,000 bottles produced. 13%

£785.63 (case of three) Wimbledon Wine Cellar & other fine wine merchants

95

**Viñedos Familia Chadwick, Viñedo Chadwick, Puente Alto, Maipo Valley, Chile 2000**

*Drink to 2027*

The wine that stole the show at the Berlin Tasting and now into its third decade, the epoch-making Viñedo Chadwick 2000 speaks of its era, with a palate that is sweet and full, with leather, kirsch and dark chocolate on an intense savoury nose of coffee grinds, black cherry and truffle alongside earthy *sous-bois*. The ample, melting tannins are fleshy, generous and round, giving a feeling and texture of richness, heft and power. This has a long savoury finish but ends a little warm. 14.2%

Secondary market only