

Ep 38 Wines of the Atacama Desert, Chile with Tara winemaker...

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SPEAKERS

Janina Doyle, Alejandro Galaz



Janina Doyle 00:07

Welcome to Eat Sleep Wine Repeat, a podcast for all you wine lovers, who, if you're like me just cannot get enough of the good stuff. I'm Janina Doyle, your host, Brand Ambassador, Wine Educator, and Sommelier, so stick with me as we dive deeper into this ever evolving wonderful world of wine. And wherever you are listening to this, cheers to you.



Janina Doyle 00:30

Hello beautiful wine lovers, it's nearly Christmas: 7th of December 2020. I think I speak for everyone when I say we all need a little bit of sparkle and magic. And today, hopefully I'm going to add a little bit extra because the theme of today is Chile. But even more exciting for me, I am talking about my winery Ventisquero Wine Estates. So, although you may know me, just from these podcasts, or perhaps you're one of my wine society members, or I've done a master class for you, my day job is talking about the incredible wines of Chile. So let's just talk Chile for a second. Chile is so unique in the fact that it's this long, skinny country. In fact, it's 4270 kilometres long, meaning that it has a multitude of different climates. It has all different type of soil types. And then what makes it very exciting is the fact that being so skinny, we're talking about 170 kilometres wide, and in fact, around 80 kilometres wide in the smallest part. You have coastal mountains and then you have the Andes mountains on the East. So anything planted by the coast, you have this incredible cooling effect from the Humboldt current, which is this cold wind that kind of gets sucked up from the Antarctic in the south. This all get sucked in. There's lots of fog, there's cloud cover. So the grapes on the coast are very, very fresh. You also have the Andes Mountains, which actually planting up into the foothills here is still something that hasn't really been explored too much. So something to look out for. But again, cold breezes coming over those Andes Mountains, cooling down the grapes so you can get some really elegant styles. And then you have the Entre Cordilleras, so 'between the mountains', which again a much hotter, more fertile land in many places, but it also really depends on if you're in the north or in the south because in the south, it's much colder, starts getting wetter, even more slightly European in style. Whereas generally, most of the wine growing regions in Chile are Mediterranean climates, so nice and warm during the summer. What makes Chile even more unique is it is the only country that has not got phylloxera. So phylloxera I have discussed in other podcasts. So if you don't know what phylloxera is, do go and check it out. It's this evil little louse that came over from America in the 1800s and

basically attacked all the roots of our European vines. So our species, *Vitis vinifera*. Basically devastated all the vineyards. Now, thankfully, we had already sent those vines out to new world countries such as Chile, Argentina, Australia, so they were already growing in other places. We then discovered we could bring back these vines and graft them on to American rootstocks, which is another species, so those rootstocks could handle phylloxera and we were still able to have the fruit from the *Vitis vinifera* species. So thankfully, we made it work. So phylloxera has travelled all over the world, as people did as plants, as vines, as things got moved and sold around the world. And the one country it has not come into is Chile, and that is because of the four natural boundaries. So those Andes Mountains we talked about, the coast, down in the south, you have Patagonia, the ice glaciers, and up in the north, you have the Atacama Desert. So this sandy and salty, as you'll find out, soils. So they act as these incredible boundaries that just won't let phylloxera, in which means Chile is the one country that can have its own original rootstocks. Now, talking of rootstocks, places further down in the south like Maule and Itata especially, are filled with old vines. And when we say old vines, it's totally normal for some old gnarly 200 year old vines. So some of the oldest vines in the world are in Chile. People are going much further down south to plant vineyards now, the furthest down south is an area called Chile Chico which is well into Patagonia and this is 46.32 degrees, on the 46th parallel and is officially the most southern vineyard. It's not a commercial planting, we can't buy the wine yet but it is the most southern and Chile certainly are pushing the boundaries. Now talking of boundaries and extreme viticulture, I'm super proud to be working with the one winery who commercially makes wines in the Atacama Desert. This is the driest desert on Earth. This is a crazy project. This is the most northern vineyards that have been planted that actually commercially make some wine. There are a few little places in the Atacama desert where people are planting or doing experiments that are further north. But this is one that you can actually purchase, that you can actually buy. So pour yourself a glass of wine, well not if you're driving, and let me tell you about Ventisquero Wine estates.



Janina Doyle 05:43

Established in 1998, so they are still a very young winery. Family owned and owned by Don Gonzales Vial. He started in the 1950s literally with a few chickens and I love that. He wasn't born into money. He bought a few chickens that gave him enough money to buy more chickens, then that turned into buying some pigs and some other animals and basically has one of the largest agricultural businesses now in South America. And so when it got to 1998 he had done everything else but wine and that is how it started. He bought 600 hectares right off the bat and was in the newspapers as 'El hombre Loco', the crazy guy just because, why would anyone buy that amount of land when you know nothing about planting vines. But if you have a little bit of money and you can hire the

right people, and he started working with fantastic people, one of the best terroir specialists in South America and probably even the world is a guy called Pedro Parra. Have a look who Pedro Parra is and who he's worked with and you'll realise he was an amazing asset to really help decide where to plant things. Now, the winery has grown and grown, there's more than just 600 hectares now, but the whole idea is about pushing the boundaries, being innovative and trying new things. One of those projects is planting in the Atacama Desert. I'm going to chat with my winemaker in a second all about that. Ventisquero Wine Estates owns vineyards in Casablanca, in Leyda, in Maipo, in the Apalta Valley. Look up these regions, they are the main regions of Chile. Something else to be super proud of is one of the winemakers you may know: John Duval. John Duval for 29 years was the chief winemaker of Penfolds Grange. If you don't know what Penfolds Grange is it's about, I don't know £500 or so on release these days. One of the most expensive wines to come out of Australia and also one of the most iconic. So once he decided to stop working at Penfolds, we managed to grab him and keep him. Originally we wanted him just as a consultant, but he loved the land so much and some of the areas where we were planting that he wanted to make some of his own wines. So if you would like to taste some of John Duval's work, with our chief winemaker, I might add Felipe Tosso, who is an award winning winemaker in Chile. The two of them do a fantastic project at the higher end of our wines. So look out for the Pangea Syrah, the Vertice, a Carménère-Syrah blend and the Enclave, which is a Cabernet Sauvignon blend. So my guest today is my winemaker. He is a cool climate specialist winemaker. So that is your Pinot Noir, Chardonnays, Sauvignon blancs. He has studied all over the world in France, he worked for the Castel group. In America, he worked for Kendall Jackson. He's worked in Switzerland as well. And then of course, returning back to Chile. He's worked at one of the biggest wineries that most of you have probably heard of Concha y Toro and even set up and planned the whole beginnings of a cool climate winery Amayna. Thankfully, we have him full time and I've had him permanently since 2006. He knows these vineyards inside and out and he's going to tell you all about the extreme viticulture and the craziness of the vineyards in the driest desert on earth now.



Janina Doyle 09:06

Thank you so much for joining us today. My winemaker. This is very exciting.



Alejandro Galaz 09:12

Thank you for the invitation. proud to be here.



Janina Doyle 09:14

Yay. We're going to talk all things wine geeky now. So I have to ask you because actually you probably told me but I forgotten. Tell all the lovely people listening. As a winemaker what got you into wine making in the first place.

A

Alejandro Galaz 09:31

Not really an experience from wine because I actually understood that the winemaking was my passion a little bit late in my life. But the thing was that for more than three or four years during university, I was trying to decide to be in an area where I could create something, that was my base. Actually the other areas of the agriculture engineer didn't have that passion and possibility to create, as winemaking. So I think that that was the most important reason why I dedicated my life for wine.

J

Janina Doyle 10:06

Were you drinking wine at the time and enjoying wine?

A

Alejandro Galaz 10:09

Always.

J

Janina Doyle 10:11

Always. Will you come from down in the south of Chile, don't you? Where, I guess you know, cooking and food is very important, right?

A

Alejandro Galaz 10:18

Yeah, actually my city is just close to, next to the Pacific Ocean. So there's a lot of seafood that I always have been in touch with. And also in my family, they used to love cooking. So I love cooking as well. So seafood and cooking. It's a very good match that need wines at the table.

J

Janina Doyle 10:37

Yeah, well, maybe that is why you have gone down the route of more cool climate grape varieties. Right? Better for seafood.

A Alejandro Galaz 10:43
You are right.

J Janina Doyle 10:45
It all make sense, now. Okay, so I've already mentioned to people listening that you know, you've done some amazing work in France, in Switzerland, which I think is super, super cool. And in America. So when you went around travelling and learning with other wineries, did you pick up some interesting tips? Or was there things that you able to bring back to Chile? As a winemaker?

A Alejandro Galaz 11:06
I mean that, in a 50% that, I think, that that's what it's all about. When you go outside the country as, if you wish to call it like that, as a flying winemaker. The idea is to get that experience that, all that winemaking techniques that maybe you won't see in your own country, so that you can know how to make wines finally, in a better way in the future. But every single country has his own, or different techniques that you can get on your experience, and then use it afterwards in your winemaking life. So yes, definitely. Every single experience outside was a tremendous experience in my winemaking life.

J Janina Doyle 11:47
Do you think that it was very different, the winemaking techniques in Switzerland, for instance, compared to France, or both being European, were they similar? Was there surprises?

A Alejandro Galaz 11:57
Yeah, well, definitely. When I was working in Switzerland, it was 95% cool climate varieties. It was nothing to do with what I did in the south of France, where I did just, Cab, Syrah and Merlot. Definitely the techniques that you use in cold climate varieties, mainly white wines are different from red wines. And then also in the south of France, where you have mediteranean varieties, that are used to heat and warm climate. So definitely, you use different techniques, and the way to make wines, the way, how winemakers can see the wine is completely different.

J Janina Doyle 12:34

So we're talking about grape varieties. What's in your opinion, one of the hardest grape varieties to work with?



Alejandro Galaz 12:40

Well, the most difficult variety, definitely is the one that steals my heart every time...



Janina Doyle 12:47

Pinot Noir?



Alejandro Galaz 12:47

...and that's Pinot Noir. You know already.



Janina Doyle 12:52

Maybe other people don't know. Pinot Noir, I always say is the kind of grape variety, in harvest, you pick it up and it bursts in your hands often...



Alejandro Galaz 12:59

It's so challenging. From the vineyard to the bottle. When you are in the vineyard, you have to pick the grapes at the right time. Otherwise, you can get green character, or in the other side, you are overcooked. So the window to collect those grapes is small in general, it will give the personalities of the wine at the end of the day. So that's a very important moment for that variety. Then when you're when you are making the fermentation inside, you don't want to over extract those very sensitive and like elegant kind of grapes. So you have to be over the fermentation every single day, maybe 3,4,5 times a day, tasting the wine. So you can really extract what you like to extract and not something else. And then when you finish that, you have to take out the thick lees and go into barrels so that they have that correct reductive oxidation kind of character to get the balance with all the time that the wine will be in the barrels, maybe a year.



Janina Doyle 14:01

So just to pause for a second, what you're saying is because Pinot Noir is going to be in barrel for a decent amount of time, you actually want it to be slightly more oxidative to survive, is that what you're saying?

- A** Alejandro Galaz 14:11
This is something, because that's a very important point that you are touching. The Pinot Noir in the beginning is very reductive or can be very reductive. But then when you take out the wine from the thick lees, after a couple of months, being in the barrel, it starts or can start an oxidative environment that can kill the wine, so you have to be over the wine every day so that you don't get into that oxidative condition. Otherwise you lose character, aromas, flavours and at the end of the day, you won't get the quality that you were expecting for.
- J** Janina Doyle 14:49
Okay, so that makes sense. And then once you've taken a barrel and you've put it in bottle, then you can calm down and breathe again, right?
- A** Alejandro Galaz 14:57
Yes it is. And then, you know that for all varieties, for all wines, the bottling process can be very stressful. And that's why you have to try to treat the wine when it's going inside the bottle with 100% of care so that after the bottling process, you still have to wait for a couple of months or at least six months so that everything goes round and balances before final consumers open the bottle. So it's kind of a special kind of variety.
- J** Janina Doyle 15:27
Special it is. So we're talking obviously just about Pinot Noir and that kind of process from all the way from harvesting through to bottling. There's a hell of a lot more processes and things you can do in the winery. What's your favourite part of the winemaking process?
- A** Alejandro Galaz 15:42
Um, I think that that answer is related to what attracted to me for winemaking, because it has to be with the every single part of the process.
- J** Janina Doyle 15:53
Oh, no that's cheating.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 15:55

I'm being diplomatic Janina. I have to be polite.

J Janina Doyle 16:01
Don't be diplomatic.

A Alejandro Galaz 16:02
Vintage, vintage is a challenge. It's always dynamic. You are moving every time. It can be very tiring, but at the same time, it gives you a lot of energy every day.

J Janina Doyle 16:16
How many hours? Are you working in the harvest? Because you basically don't get any sleep? You say goodbye to your kids and your wife. Right?

A Alejandro Galaz 16:23
For six months.

J Janina Doyle 16:25
Come on, six months! Not quite. But you say for a few weeks, it's like, yeah, see you later.

A Alejandro Galaz 16:29
Yeah, I mean, it's an average of 12 hours minimum, maybe 14. That's the average everyday because, yeah, in winemaking it's there's a very important moment for each variety to be fermented. It's the opportunity of the work. If you have to make pump over now and you don't make it and the result to do it tomorrow is not the same. You lose the opportunity. The opportunity of the work is very, very important in the success of the result. So you must be there every time. And then when we pass the time, and you have to taste the wine every month after it has been in barrel, it's always very nice to see how the wine is evolving in a positive way. So that they, you have to be careful in the moment that you make the decision to take out the wines, out of the barrels to go into bottles. So every time it's nice and if you ask me when you have the bottle at the table, a nice Pinot Noir bottle with a Magret de Canard or something similar.

J Janina Doyle 17:35
Oh, you love your duck, don't you, Yes?

A Alejandro Galaz 17:37
I mean, that's an amazing moment as well.

J Janina Doyle 17:39
Perfect pairing. So, you mentioned about you have to be there during harvest for every second because as an example, if you don't do pumping over in the moment, that's right, the next day, you don't get the result. What could happen, just in terms of pumping over so I know that pumping over often is about extracting a bit of colour, maybe taking more tannins, and also, maybe moving around the air. So what could be the difference between day one and doing it, and day two and doing it?

A Alejandro Galaz 18:06
That's a, Yeah, it is not difficult to answer that. But if I'm in the beginning or in the middle of the fermentation, and I don't do the pump over, yeast is going to continue fermenting, transforming the sugar into alcohol. So if I do the pump over tomorrow, or after tomorrow, the environment will be much warmer and with much more alcohol than the day before. Okay, when you extract then with more alcohol, you can get some bitterness, or other kind of bad characteristics. So you've lost the opportunity to do it in the right moment.

J Janina Doyle 18:43
But I suppose, something like Pinot Noir, that would be far more important because you're trying to get a much more elegant, fresher style, right? But maybe with something like Cabernet Sauvignon, you might want to do it the second day when there's more alcohol perhaps? Would that be fair to say?

A Alejandro Galaz 18:58
That's why there are some varieties that are much more easy to make than Pinot Noir.

J Janina Doyle 19:03
So just tell us before we move on, what is the easiest grape variety for you? Don't be

diplomatic.

A Alejandro Galaz 19:11
Yeah maybe, could be Syrah or Carménère?

J Janina Doyle 19:15
OK Syrah, Carménère. Interesting that you say Carménère. Carménère for anyone who doesn't realise, is Chile's grape variety. There's a whole story on Carménère that we can go into as some point.

A Alejandro Galaz 19:24
Yeah, our flagship variety.

J Janina Doyle 19:25
It is. That is something, you know, that I suppose 20 years ago, Chilean winemakers, because, the wine industry was still just learning and growing. That's why you guys started doing a lot of flying winemaking right? Carménère was actually a bit of a pernickety, a bit of a fussy grape variety, I thought. But do you feel like now, understanding how Carménère is, it's much easier to manage?

A Alejandro Galaz 19:45
Definitely because, remember that before in the past, Carménère was in between the vine of the Merlot so all was fermented together and they had a completely different moment to be picked. So normally when the Merlot grapes were picked in between the vineyard of this variety there were this plant of Carménère that used to ripen like a month after. So you have sometimes green characters. After we separated those varieties into individual blocks, we understood that the right moment to pick the Carménère grapes were much later than the Merlot. So finally we started to make a better wine for the Merlot and for the Carménère.

J Janina Doyle 20:27
Yeah, No, so it's interesting and anyone who doesn't know about Carménère, it was discovered in 1994. Actually, ironically 24th of November so we've just missed Carménère Day, so go get a bottle anyway and pretend it's Carménère Day.

A Alejandro Galaz 20:39
Yea it was it's birthday a couple of days ago.

J Janina Doyle 20:41
Yeah, we just missed the birthday but um, you know, it is pretty amazing that for so many years, so for 100 years, 100 years because this great variety came from France, people thought it was Merlot, Chilean Merlot. So it's a very cool story. It was resurrected.

A Alejandro Galaz 20:55
It wasn't really loved in France, because it was a Bordeaux variety that didn't ripen well. Remember that there's a couple of showers and rains that comes in between the harvest in Bordeaux.

J Janina Doyle 21:06
a couple? Or 3, 4, 5 or 6.

A Alejandro Galaz 21:11
We say here, that that's the place where the weather tells the winemaker when to pick a not the winemaker, is the one that picks when he wants. So at that time, in the old days in France, they picked the Carménère that was green and they didn't like this green character. The thing that was, that Carménère, it wasn't planted in the right side of the world. But, in Chile, there's perfect environment and weather for having that variety here.

J Janina Doyle 21:37
Yeah, it found its home hasn't it, so more people do need to drink Carménère. Okay, so I want to ask you, what has surprised you the most about being a winemaker?

A Alejandro Galaz 21:46
I think that the opportunity that this job has given to me to travel around the world, showing the wines, knowing, understanding different cultures. That has been very, very surprising. For the heart of the UK and American market to the very deep Asian countries. It has been an amazing journey.



Janina Doyle 22:09

This is the joys of wine though. This is why I'm in the wine industry because it is wine, food, culture, travel. They all together. Okay, so tell me them, what is a normal day in the life of a winemaker when your harvest is over? When you're not doing 12 to 14 hours a day, you're not worrying about fermentation? And once everything is in the barrels, everything is just relaxing and chilling out. What do you do when you go in there in the morning?



Alejandro Galaz 22:33

Well separating the 10 or 12 weeks that we are abroad because of travelling. When we are here at the winery a normal day is tasting wines, making blends. Planning what you are going to blend probably the next month. Keeping in touch every day with your team so that they can have all the information to do a good job in terms of planning, in terms of how to make a blend with all the details that the winemaker would like to have. Yeah, I mean, also some numbers as well, because we have to be over numbers as well. In terms of...



Janina Doyle 23:11

The boring side. The legal side.



Alejandro Galaz 23:15

Yeah. You must do because rentability is part of a very important part of sustainability as well. It's a pillar of the sustainability as well. So we have to work with that every day as well. And from November until the harvest in the November, December, one day every two weeks to the vineyard to see how the bunches are evolving. And then middle of January, once a week, definitely in the vineyard.



Janina Doyle 23:43

I remember when, you might remember, when I was in Chile in 2018. And I was in the tasting room. And my favourite part of my experience because I did a lot of different aspects of the winemaking process, was for the Pangea, which is, if anyone who doesn't know it's a fantastic Shiraz, one of our icon wines in Ventisquero, comes from the Apalta Vineyards. And what I found fascinating was we had taken lots of different samples from lots of different barrels, and some were free run juice, some was first pressed, some was second pressed and third pressed. If anyone who doesn't know what I mean, that is, whilst they're still on the skins, so for every different press, you're going to get a little more, a

little bit more tannins. And we sat in the tasting room, and we played around with the different samples, the different compounds of the wine and to decide what percentage of kind of first pressed Syrah, was going to be blended with second and third and actually ironically, the one that I liked the most you picked so I like to pretend that for anyone drinking the 2018 Pangea when it comes out. That was me, I did that. Alejandro did nothing. No other winemakers did a thing, that was all me. But for me, I think that's fascinating playing around with the same grape variety from the same vineyard but pressed in a different way, that some are slightly more perfumed and concentrated some a bit more tannic and a little bit drier, and then choosing how do you make your final product.

A

Alejandro Galaz 25:14

That's so fascinating part of the winemaking. I love blending because as you said, you have different compounds. It's like a painting, so that, a little bit more artistical, artisan part of your soul is going out when you blend. From one side you have the author kind of style of wine that you would like to impress in your in your wine. But then you also have to also, what is the final consumers preference? So it's a kind of big challenge when you are sitting at the blending table to, with all this 8, 9, 15 kind of compounds to see what is coming out of that moment. I think is one of the most interesting part of the winemaking.

J

Janina Doyle 25:57

Haha, I got it. That's your favourite. You said you were trying to be diplomatic. Now we know everyone. We heard it here first. Okay, so did you hear about a Spanish winery? This is early this year, probably only a month ago or so. One of their tanks 50,000 litres of red wine just spilled out. all over the floor. There was a video of this tank just, oh, did you? Did you hear about this?

A

Alejandro Galaz 26:22

Yeah. And it happens.

J

Janina Doyle 26:24

Yeah, it does. It does happen. This is poor Bodegas Vitivinos I think, who this happened to. And I just thought...

- A** Alejandro Galaz 26:30
That happened at the winery yeah?
- J** Janina Doyle 26:31
This happened at the winery, just recently, just this year, and I just thought, you must have had some pretty impressive and sad stories or disaster stories happen at the winery. Tell me something.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 26:41
Yeah I mean, we have a couple of those throughout, not as big as that one. But you have to remember what happened in Chile in 2010?
- J** Janina Doyle 26:54
HmMMM yes sadly.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 26:55
The earthquake. If you imagine that 50,000 litres is a big volume. You can't imagine what happened in wineries in 2010 after the earthquake. Yeah, because thousand millions of millions of litres were thrown out to the floor.
- J** Janina Doyle 27:12
The earthquake affected more of the southern areas of Chile right like Maule and Itata or was it actually...no, everywhere? I'm completely wrong?
- A** Alejandro Galaz 27:20
You know that Chile is very long and narrow yeah? 500 kilometres long. That was where the earthquake was.
- J** Janina Doyle 27:31
Oh, gosh. Wow!

A Alejandro Galaz 27:33
It wasn't a spot, a specific spot where was the earthquake. The earthquake was 500 kilometres long. So there were many wineries from Maule till areas near Santiago that were affected. Not only tanks, but barrel rooms that were a complete disaster. All were fall down to the floor. All the barrels were cracked, the high quality wine was down the floor.

J Janina Doyle 28:00
Wow. Well, so for anybody tasting 2010 just remember how lucky you are to have some 2010 liquid because imagine the percentage... Do you happen to know what percentage of loss there was in Chile that year? Just off the top of your head?

A Alejandro Galaz 28:14
18 million litres.

J Janina Doyle 28:16
Wow, that is shocking.

A Alejandro Galaz 28:17
Shocking, really!

J Janina Doyle 28:18
So what fun, slightly less dramatic stories have happened in the winery then.

A Alejandro Galaz 28:22
Maybe not throwing the wine to the floor, but maybe you have in a, in a tank that is not well identified. You have a white wine, and then you put it and you blend it inside with the red wine, and you won't get a rosé wine.

J Janina Doyle 28:27
Well you do, but it's an illegal one. So that may have happened once or twice, huh?

A

Alejandro Galaz 28:44

Yeah, it happens. The long time that we haven't had that mistake, but it happens. And it has happened here at the winery as well.

J

Janina Doyle 28:53

Yeah, and you're not telling me my favourite story, which I know about, which I'm trying to squeeze out of you, about a blocked pump. Come on. Tell everybody about the fun blocked pumped story.

A

Alejandro Galaz 29:02

Well, it was many years ago. We were trying to get grapes from Pinot Noir to an open tank so that we have to fill the tank from the top. And I wanted to cool those grapes so I wanted to pass through a heat exchanger, to get down the temperature of the outside. Yeah a heat exchanger to get down the temperatures of 24, 25 degrees that is the environment temperature outside, to 7, 8 degrees, 8 Celsius degrees to make a cold soak and a cold maturation for a week before starting the alcoholic fermentation. So we had to pass through the heat exchanger that was very thin. It wasn't the same wide of the, of the hose. So we have to go in that heat exchanger, that was very thin. So when the grapes arrived to the pump, it was completely blocked. And there was a girl that was watching this and she was in front of the pump, and the pump was running, but it was wasn't going outside the heat exchanger. And suddenly the grapes de-blocked and booooffff! And the girl was, and remember that the grapes have a lot amount of sugar. So she was, from the top till the feet, completely washed with sweet juice. And she just went outside trying to move as less as possible. But she was completely washed with this sweet juice. She had to change all the clothes. I mean, it was very, very funny.

J

Janina Doyle 30:40

Well, you know, they say that wine is good for your skin. So imagine that was quite a good facial scrub for her right?

A

Alejandro Galaz 30:46

Yeah, wine, not juice.

J

Janina Doyle 30:48

Okay. Yeah, but that is brilliant. Right so, enough of winemaking. Let's talk about this incredible vineyard site that Ventisquero has up in the Atacama Desert. Now, did you bring your Tara Chardonnay with you, where you're sat? Or is it just me with a glass of wine?

A Alejandro Galaz 31:04
Just you darling.

J Janina Doyle 31:05
Ahhhhh, just me. Oh, well, don't worry it.

A Alejandro Galaz 31:07
But I know the wine. I know the wine for sure, so...

J Janina Doyle 31:10
I'll test you. I've got it in front of me. I'm going to drink it now. And you're going to tell me all about it. So tell everyone listening, why are you crazy enough to have ever thought that you could make wine in the Atacama desert? The driest desert on earth? Why?

A Alejandro Galaz 31:24
The driest desert on earth. That's the place where the NASA go and make the trials with the Pathfinder to see how he's going to work afterwards in Mars. Yeah, that that has been an amazing journey, because we still enjoy every time that we have the possibility to go there. And then after, when we have to ferment those grapes and drink the wine. At the end of the day, the Atacama Desert was a place that it wasn't in our minds to be part of our portfolio, part of our vineyard surface. But the owner had some olive trees over there. So on 2007, actually, in February of 2007, we decided to go over there to see because in those areas in the world where olive trees gives a nice quality of olives, vines or wines are very good. Yeah, let's go and see what is happening. When we were going over there, we were discussing between the viticulturist team and the winemaking team that this will be a very warm and dry place. So maybe Mediterranean varieties, as Grenache, Mourvèdre, Carignan could work or maybe some Bordeaux varieties as Petit Verdot or Carménère. But what we didn't know was that this place was almost 25 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean without any range of mountains between the place on the ocean, so it was cold and windy.



Janina Doyle 32:53

Well, it's crazy, isn't it? Because where you said that there's no coastal mountains. Ironically, there's two mountains that run transversally right, so they act as like a tunnel. So not only do you not have a mountain, but you just got this thing sucking through even, the wind goes much....



Alejandro Galaz 33:06

And that's why it's so windy. And because through that corridor that you are mentioning, yeah, the wind comes from the sea through the inland and gets this windy condition in the place where the vineyard is now. So at that moment, when we arrived there, we arrived at 11 o'clock in the morning in the middle of a very strange and particular phenomenon that happens in the north of Chile that is called the Camanchaca. The Camanchaca is a very thick fog that comes twice a day, to the inland from the sea at 10, 11 o'clock in the morning and then at 5, 6 o'clock in the afternoon and gives a special like humidity to the vines, that in other parts of the world you can say that humidity is not as good as other kind of climate because it can give a fungus condition. Not here because the environment is so dry that here this humidity for this 45 minutes around an hour. It helps a lot the different crops, not only the vines but the different crops in the area to get this little bit of humid environment to develop. So we arrived at that time. 11 o'clock in the morning, in the middle of this thick fog in a place where I was 25 kilometres from the sea. So it was cold. I mean, this is not a place for warm climate varieties or Mediterranean varieties. This is a place for cool climate varieties.



Janina Doyle 34:33

And the closest part of vineyards are about 18 kilometres to the coast. That's correct, right?



Alejandro Galaz 34:37

Yeah, 18 kilometres. That is the newest area that we planted a couple of years after the first one.



Janina Doyle 34:43

You couldn't go any closer than 18 kilometres to the coast right because any closer and then it's actually too cold to grow any grapes, right?

A

Alejandro Galaz 34:51

Yeah, I don't know if people know cold climate, Chilean cold climate. The two most important valleys are Casablanca and Leyda. Leyda is a place that is more or less 10 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean. And Casablanca is about 25 kilometres from the Pacific Ocean. This is a place that in terms of climate is in the middle of the two of those. So it's has an average of 14, 15 Celsius degrees of temperature, maximum temperature between 23, 24 Celsius degrees, and the minimum temperature at night goes down at 7, 8 Celsius degrees. So it's definitely cool climate.

J

Janina Doyle 35:28

Yeah, it's incredible. Now, you talk about cool climate. But what fascinates me the most is the soil. So do you want to tell us all abit...

J

Janina Doyle 35:36

Yes, Barolo.

A

Alejandro Galaz 35:36

The soil is, when we arrived there, actually, we said one day before to some people to make a pit. That means a hole in the soil to see what is happening downstairs. So when we arrived inside the pit, we saw that we were in the second terrace of the Huasco River, so we have these round stones. There were, was many of them. In between them, there was this white kind of soil, that is limestone. So more than the 80% of the vineyards in Chile are planted in granite soil. So that's the style of what the wines are from Chile, but to have limestone soil, calcium, calcareous soil. That's very difficult to find. And you know that all the areas in, around the world, the wine regions that have this kind of soils give amazing wines like Burgundy, couple of places in Italy.

A

Alejandro Galaz 36:28

Spain, Australia, Sicilia as well. So we were in presence of something unique and very different of what we used to have at that moment in the Ventisquero surface. So we decided to plant the white varieties, Pinot Noir, Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay mainly, with a little spot of Syrah, Merlot and some Viognier. What we didn't see at that moment was, I mean, this was kind of, its struggling us till today. Is the amount of salt that was in the soil because the salt that was in the soil wasn't coming from the water, it was in the soil, struggles the roots and doesn't give the environment for them to develop normally. So

we planted and second year, the plants, the vines weren't growing normally. So we started to get worried. So we make an analysis to the soil and we detected that there was 10 times the amount of salt of what a vine can support in the science reports. But even that, nature opens the road and the vines survived. And when you taste the grapes coming from that kind of soil, it's really impressive because the character, the flavour is so unique.

J

Janina Doyle 37:47

Yes, I can tell you right now. So I've got the Tara Chardonnay, 2016 in my hand right now. This is my favourite of the Tara wines, because actually because of the cloudiness as well, the turbidity, this is something a little bit more unique because none of these wines are filtered or fined. They're made naturally. And as you would say, it's not that you were intentionally trying to make a natural wine, even though they do fit into that category, but it's about trying to just do nothing to it. Really let it...

A

Alejandro Galaz 38:13

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. I mean, the place was so special. The character of the wine was so unique, that giving another kind of complexity, making more intervention through or during the winemaking wasn't the idea. So we decided to stay in the backstage so that what you have afterwards in the glass, is the terroir, is the place that is talking about and are not the winemaker style. That's why the wine is unfiltered. You can see that the white wine is hazy, is cloudy, is made with native yeasts and then it goes to very old barrels at the beginning. Nowadays is being made in concrete eggs and foudres, untoasted foudres so that you can really get the character of the place where the grapes are coming from.

J

Janina Doyle 39:01

Just for me the saltiness, everybody tastes this, and of course I can say now, you are left with this slightly saline finish but it's chalky as well. So you get that chalkiness from the limestone soil, you get the saltiness from the salt. It really, if anyone wants to know what is terroir, what does terroir taste like in a glass? This is stunning. And I always think I don't know if you remember this because this is many years ago, the Tara Chardonnay, this wine that I'm drinking now was the first South American wine to be in the top five restaurants voted in The Worlds 50 Best, so I think that's what it's called. If you go to theworlds50best.com, at that time, the first five restaurants on that list had the Tara Chardonnay. This is the only wine in South America to have done that. Congratulations Alejandro, that you have made a wine so special and so superb that you can say that, that's amazing.

A

Alejandro Galaz 39:53

We are very proud about that. Not only because it was in those five best restaurants, but also because you have the opportunity to ferment these grapes and to have a vineyard over there, is really an opportunity that maybe other winemakers doesn't have. And being in the middle of this team working, that is working with these grapes is fascinating, really.

J

Janina Doyle 40:15

And this is not exactly close to Santiago and it's not close to the winery either. I mean, how long does it take you to get up there?

A

Alejandro Galaz 40:21

This is 850 kilometres north of Santiago. Santiago is two hours north east from where the winery is. So it's about 12 hours ride easily. What do we do is to have the grapes in small cases of 10 kilos each, we put it in a refrigerated truck, and then comes along all the way down to the winery

J

Janina Doyle 40:43

And to be honest aswell, you said about 850 kilometres north. This is the most northern commercial winery. I mean, the nearest winery, am I right, is in Elqui, which is the next wine region down. They're about 300 kilometres further south, right?

A

Alejandro Galaz 40:56

South. Yeah.

J

Janina Doyle 40:57

That's crazy that that's the difference. So not only are these vineyards, the most northern vineyards, but they're 300 kilometres further than the other most northern vineyards.

A

Alejandro Galaz 41:07

Actually, we moved the boundaries because the old maps of the winemaking regions in Chile didn't have the Huasco Valley in the map, The maps finished in Elqui. Now the maps have moved to the north of Chile. 300 kilometres north.

- J** Janina Doyle 41:22
In fact, you say that, if people Google Wines of Chile map, you will see a lot of the old maps on Google Images. So for anybody looking, if you look at Elqui, and there's nothing above it, try and search for the official Wines of Chile map because, yeah, Huasco, which is where it is in Atacama Desert has now been added on, it's brilliant.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 41:42
Yeah, well, part of the philosophy of Ventisquero Wine Estates is to move the boundaries. To keep on establishing no. You know our idea is always to try to innovate and also extreme places. Extreme places are going to give you always extreme wines. And that's what we are always looking for.
- J** Janina Doyle 42:01
Yeah, I've heard you know, birdies told me that people should pay attention to Ventisquero Wine Estates because at some point, there may be some other boundaries being conquered perhaps. So people should, maybe, exactly, me neither.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 42:14
I don't have any information about that.
- A** Alejandro Galaz 42:16
I don't know what you are talking about.
- J** Janina Doyle 42:16
Nor do I.
- J** Janina Doyle 42:18
Exactly, nor do I. So this beautiful Tara Chardonnay because you haven't got it so I'm gonna have to eat actually stunning and I'm drinking it in a Gabriel Glas, it's my favourite. I got some Zalto glasses and I got some, I suppose, Gabriel Glas is probably how you pronounce it and I got Gabriel Glas aswell.



Alejandro Galaz 42:34

Oh I don't know them. I must taste in those kind of glasses.



Janina Doyle 42:37

I actually have to say this is proper mouthblown and they're lighter than the Zalto glasses I have and they're just divine. So anybody who wants to get some special glasses for Christmas, Gabriel Glas. And the Chardonnay is delicious in this and it's got this real mango intensity. So really tropical fruit but with such elegance, it doesn't have any of that sweetness. It's just softened by this slightly flinty, chalky nature. Lots of white flowers. It's very pretty you feel like you are in some perfumed, fragrance field, sort of thing. But more importantly, there's a purity on the palate that I just adore. It's just soft and smooth.



Alejandro Galaz 43:15

Yeah, I mean, flavour is so special that chalky feeling. That persistence in the palate with that saltiness. It's also a very nice friend for food. It's a gastronomical wine definitely. So you really enjoy food with this kind of wine. Oysters, Sea urchins, kind of oily fish, white meats. I mean there's a lot of the world of possibilities to match with these kind of wines.



Janina Doyle 43:20

And also even like some beautiful salmon with kind of some pickled cucumber, and dill.



Alejandro Galaz 43:49

I mean Tara Chardonnay with salmon or smoky salmon. That's kind of paradise.



Janina Doyle 43:56

It is paradise. Where is my salmon right now? Anybody wants to know I can only tell you of the UK prices it's about £40 a bottle. This is not a cheap wine. But considering only a few thousand bottles each year are made. It's so special.



Alejandro Galaz 44:08

Between 6 and 7,000 bottles a year for the Chardonnay for the whole world.

J Janina Doyle 44:12
Exactly. You can get in the UK, this is about £40 pound a bottle from The Wine Treasury. So anybody who wants to try something very special and unique with a story, then obviously then you want to go there, but we have these in America. The wines are in China, they're in all around Europe because they are so special. A little bit of allocation goes to most places in the world so people can get it. Alejandro, thank you so much. Honestly, just we haven't even touched the surface of how special the Atacama desert is but I will ask people listening to contact me if they have any questions because it is really just a magical, magical place isn't it.

A Alejandro Galaz 44:45
I mean and the same if there's any technical question that they would like to know you can pass me as well, so I can answer all of them and be very happy to clear all the doubts.

J Janina Doyle 44:57
Alejandro loves to be a wine geek so please contact me, to contact him and he will definitely, you'll regret it - He'll give you so much information. We love it. And thank you so much. It's been fab. And we'll have to do this again sometime, when you have a glass of wine in hand.

A Alejandro Galaz 45:14
Yeah, thank you very much for the opportunity Janina, I mean, it was a very nice conversation and exchanging of information about Ventisquero Wine Estates wines, and if you have the opportunity in the future to talk about more wines, more harvest and more places. Why not?

J Janina Doyle 45:32
I think we're gonna have.

A Alejandro Galaz 45:33
It will be a wonderful time.

J Janina Doyle 45:35

Absolutely. Till the next time Alejandro. I'll speak to you soon.

A Alejandro Galaz 45:37
Thank you very much.

J Janina Doyle 45:38
Chao, Chao.

A Alejandro Galaz 45:39
Chao, Chao.

J Janina Doyle 45:44
So did you know that there were wines being made in the Atacama Desert. Let me know where is the most extreme place that you've tasted wine from? Certainly winemakers all over the world are pushing the boundaries constantly. So the wine world just continues to get more exciting. Now, I hope you're all writing your lists to Santa. If you fancy a little bit of help in terms of what might be good for a wine lover or for yourself, I've come up with a few things that I think would make somebody very happy. I mentioned those wine glasses, Gabriel Glas, this is the Gold Edition I'm talking about. So their real top one. If anybody is after getting some for somebody, they are £30 a glass. Anybody wanting to push the boat out for a wine lover, a coravin is an amazing idea starting at about £160. This is a piece of equipment that allows you to take wine out of a bottle without opening the cork. So basically, it has some argon gas attached, as the needle goes into the cork and sucks out the wine, where oxygen would start obviously oxidising, it replaces that with some argon gas, very clever piece of kit. So check out a coravin. And now you can even buy special coravin screwcaps. So this allows you to use the coravin on a wine with a screwcap, not just for cork, so it's getting more advanced all the time. Go and check out coravins. And if you're looking for something new and exciting as a Christmas stocking filler, google Repour wine saver. It's basically a bottle stop and it has the ability to suck out the oxygen just because of the material, when you put it in the bottle, meaning your wine can last a little bit longer. My good friend Mr. Amazon is charging £19.99 for a pack of 10. Now for anybody who is in the mood for giving do go across to my Patreon account that's patreon.com/EatSleepWineRepeat. As I mentioned in the last few episodes, there is extra exclusive content just for you. In this week's episode, it's going to be about some more gadgets, some more gifts and more ideas for presents and of course presents for yourself. And also I will touch a little bit on Chile. A little bit more of the south and those old vines.

So if you are enjoying these podcasts, for just a couple of quid a month, you have access to extra information just for you. Now as ever, thank you for everybody who is sharing these podcasts liking them, writing the comments. You guys are amazing. I spoke to Santa. He says you're on the very, very nice list, so nobody is getting coal this year.



Janina Doyle 48:24

Now to finish off as always, not quite a wine quote, but more just a tiny section of a wine poem by Pablo Neruda, a very influential Chilean poet. It's a poem called Ode to Wine. Do look it up. It's really, really long. But I'm going to read just the last part, which I quite like and it says: "Drink it and remember in every drop of gold, in every Topaz glass, in every purple ladle, that autumn laboured to fill the vessel with wine, and in the ritual of his office, let the simple man remember to think of the soil and of his duty to propagate the canticle of the wine." So as day by day we get closer to Christmas. I hope you have egg-nogs at the ready, mince pies to shove in the oven and a cellar, a wine rack or even a kitchen cupboard filled with delicious wine, ready to eat, drink and be merry. Sneak preview of the next episode will be on pairing wine with chocolate and so until the next time guys, cheers to you!