

Collectors Corner

December 2009

Carmin de Peumo



Carmenère is my current candidate for the next grape to capture the attention of red wine lovers. The grape languished in relative obscurity until the mid-nineties when growers in Chile rediscovered what they thought they had been bottling as Merlot was in fact carmenère, the ancient, lost grape of Bordeaux. Rarely found today in France, or most wine regions in the world, the grape was virtually wiped out by phylloxera in the mid 19th-century. But even then carmenère only held a minor role as one of Bordeaux's six blending grapes. Today however, just as malbec is Argentina's iconic wine, carmenère has become the signature red wine grape of Chile.

Not one of the easiest grapes to grow because of its propensity for poor fruit set and late ripening, Chile is the only wine region to do particularly well with carmenère. Surrounded by the Andes mountain range, carmenère grown in Chilean micro-climates enjoys long warm days and nights cooled by Pacific winds, yielding a wine with lush, fleshy fruit.

While carmenère is attributed to giving Chilean blended cabernets their distinctiveness, it is increasingly bottled as a single varietal. It is a wine with a deep red color and an amazing breadth and range of flavors from green pepper to blackberry to chocolate. The wine's textures are often entirely distinctive from one vineyard to the next and dark and full in a way that merlot drinkers dream of but don't always find.

A testament that smaller wineries are not necessarily always better, Concha y Toro, is Chile's leading producer. Planted to a staggering 14,000 acres, quality does not suffer across its broad range of styles or

price. Don Melchor founded the winery in 1883 and built his legendary Casillero del Diablo, or *Cellar of the Devil*, named to scare vineyard workers from drinking too much of the wine. Today Concha y Toro makes wines from ten estate vineyards, all with their own unique micro-climates. It is from the unique soils of the Peumo Vineyard of the Rapel Valley that *Carmin de Peumo*, Concha y Toro's flagship carmenère from the 2005 vintage, was grown and produced.

Rarely, even for those fortunate to taste wines professionally, does a wine come along that from the first tantalizing aromas to the extended mouthwatering finish, capture the senses so profoundly. This crimson colored beauty powers across the palate without gipping; bursts with lush, flesh dark fruit juices and bittersweet chocolate, while maintaining its balance and weight. This was only the fourth wine in a tasting of more than twenty I was to taste at this event, but I was so taken by the *Carmin de Peumo*, I walked away. I did not want to tarnish the lingering sensation that I just might have experienced one of the greatest wines I had ever tasted!

Less than 1000 cases of this wine was produced and it's not cheap, pushing into triple digit prices. But it is an incredible wine worthy of any serious collectors cellar. For those without the deep pockets, take a look at the rest of the Concha y Toro portfolio. You'll rarely be disappointed with any of their wines at any price point.

To learn more about *Carmin de Peumo* and Concha y Toro, visit their website www.conchaytoro.com