



## **(oops)<sup>TM</sup> in the vineyards**

December 15, 2006, New York - Most of Chile's wines have traditionally come from the Valle Central, a 1000-kilometer-long plateau separated from the Pacific Ocean to the west by a relatively low coastal range, and flanked on the east by the Andes Mountains. The climate is Mediterranean, described by some as lying between Napa Valley and Bordeaux, broadly defined by a lack of rainfall during the long, summer growing season, and bright, cloudless days. The Valle Central temperatures are moderated by the influence of the Pacific and the cool Humboldt Current, an ideal climate for viticulture.

Chile's winegrowing regions are as diverse as those of California and France, with a myriad of microclimates and soil types. The grapes for (oops)<sup>TM</sup> are sourced primarily from three estate-owned vineyards in subregions of the Valle Central, supplemented by nearby contracted growers. The modest and abundant supply of vineyard labor, as compared to most California wineries, makes investment in old-world techniques viable on a large scale. The grape quality delivered is superior simply because there is greater ability to use artisanal practices in the vineyards, which in turn produce better fruit.

### **Santa Lucila, Curicó**

This vineyard, approximately 60 kilometers north of Chilcas, has produced the world's first Carmenère Blanc. Purchased in 2002, the Carmenère had been planted in lean, stony soils in a cool climate due to proximity to the Andes and the influence of a major nearby river. The trellising that had been selected was of the overhead variety, suitable for managing vigor in a warm climate with fertile soils, but not optimal for this long-hanging variety in this terroir. Oops. Wishing to make the best wines possible from the existing situation, and noting a delightful floral quality and spiciness from the Carmenère, the winemakers innovated the idea of producing a dry, rosé-style wine—a white Carmenère. The wines would be vinified in a rosé style, which forgave leanness but optimized the body, color, and aromatics of the Carmenère varietal. The result is a distinctive rosé-style wine, dry, full of texture and complexity, and the first-ever style of its kind.

### **Chilcas Vineyard, Maule**

The Chilcas Vineyard is a vast estate totaling 1,400 hectares, of which 530 are planted primarily with Carmenère and Cabernet Sauvignon, along with other red and white varieties. The large vineyard hosts numerous distinct microclimates, which enables the winemakers to selectively plant different varieties in those areas where the grapes will thrive. Organic Carmenère and Cabernet Sauvignon are planted on a 45-hectare portion of the vineyard. The learning from this vineyard is applied to the rest of the estates with



an overall philosophy of sustainability, including minimal applications of commercial fertilizer and pesticides, resulting in a focus on creating balanced vines and vineyard ecosystems.

The soils on the estate tend toward well-drained, sandy, alluvial types which generally describe most of the Valle Central, influenced by erosion from the Andes and river runoff and silt from melting snows during the growing season. Irrigation is not a problem. The vineyard is bordered by shallow rolling foothills (400 meters) where the soil is leaner, sloping into flatter blocks with richer soils. Quality corresponds to elevation at Chilcas, with reserva vines identified by a system of flags and markers placed at varying levels and vinified separately for creating the (oops)<sup>TM</sup> blends.

There is a state-of-the-art winemaking and barrel-aging facility on the estate at Chilcas. The primary advantage is that the grapes are harvested and brought directly to press. This is typically the purview of a smaller, artisanal producer, since time spent in bins traveling from a remote site to the crush pad can be detrimental to quality. At Chilcas, the winemakers of (oops)<sup>TM</sup> have the boutique-producer advantage of picking and pressing in short order.

### **Nilahue, Colchagua**

This vineyard, seemingly lost in the middle of the coastal mountain range, is affectionately called “Nilandia”. The local winemakers describe it as having a feeling of “being in the middle of nowhere.” It is a large site planted with both white and red varieties. Nilahue has a stainless steel winery in the vineyard, allowing the fruit to be transferred to the press not long after harvesting. This is one of the famous mixed estates with much interplanting of Merlot and Carmenère. Over time, the winemakers became adept at identifying the separate varieties and started to differentiate and mark the two vines, painting the stocks of the Merlot red. The first clue begins in early spring during the first week or two of the growing season as the leaves begin to push. It was observed that the Merlot sprout exhibited a little bit of red, which in time turns to white. In contrast, the Carmenère shoots are very red, and remain so. The leaves differ subtly. The Carmenère leaf is oval trending to round; the Merlot leaf more closely resembles Cabernet Sauvignon, with deeper serration on the edges. The ripe Merlot berry has softer skin, while Carmenère is somewhat sturdier. In the fall, Merlot leaves turn yellow, while Carmenère leaves turn red. As their knowledge of this vineyard grew, the winemakers were able to orchestrate a double harvest; one for Merlot and later, one for Carmenère—again an illustration of how much handwork goes into these wines. The lots are macerated and fermented separately to retain their individual varietal characters and to achieve the desired level of color and flavor.



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