



VIÑEDOS de ALCOHUAZ

ELQUI VALLEY

The Elqui Valley of northern Chile borders one of the driest spots on earth – the Atacama Desert. For well over 100 years, grapes grown here were largely eaten or distilled into Pisco, the brash brandy that is the national spirit of Chile and Peru. The Elqui Valley stretches from the coastal plain outside the city of La Serena, renowned for its beaches packed with tourists during the summer, all the way up into the Andes Mountains. With less than 7cm of rainfall annually, grape production is limited to bench lands close to the River Elqui and historically favored heat and drought tolerant varieties such as Pedro Ximénez – an ideal variety for distillation.

Viñedos de Alcohuz, named after a small village high up in the Elqui Valley, was founded in 2005 by Patricio & Alvaro Flaño after a visiting friend suggested that the boulder-strewn, sandy granite soils of the area looked to be the perfect place to plant some vines. After confirmation of the area's potential by viticulturalist Eduardo Silva, Patricio and his son Alvaro began planting Syrah, Malbec, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Garnacha, Petite Syrah, Petit Verdot, Cariñena and Touriga Nacional at elevations ranging between 1800–2200 meters above sea level. The Cabernet Franc and Merlot did not survive, but the other varieties thrived. Now totalling 18 hectares (with an additional 2 hectares Roussanne and Marsanne recently planted but not yet in production), Viñedos de Alcohuz has the distinction of being one of the highest commercial vineyard in the world.

The elevation and arid climate presents some unique challenges for the production of fine wines at Alcohuz. Luckily the valley is so steep and narrow this far up into the Andes, that the vineyards are close enough to the River Elqui to benefit from groundwater deep underground. The property also has a spring-fed reservoir to keep the vines from suffering



too much during the growing season. Another problem is the intense UV light at this elevation and latitude. Relying on the experiences of generations of Pisco producers, the vines are trained in pergolas locally known as *parron elquiño*, which creates a canopy of leaves to protect the fruit from the intense light of day. While temperatures during the day are hot, the evenings are quite cold and diurnal shifts of up to 25°C are not uncommon. Obviously under these conditions farming is easily sustainable but Patricio and Alvaro have tended their vineyards organically and biodynamically since they were planted but have no plans to seek certification.

FACTS & FIGURES

FOUNDED

2005

PROPRIETOR

Alvaro & Patricio Flaño

WINEMAKER

Marcelo Retamal

SIZE

20 ha

ELEVATION

1720-2206 meters above sea level

SOILS

Sand, granite, gravel

VINE AGE

9-14 years old

VARIETIES

Syrah, Garnacha, Malbec, Petite Syrah, Petit Verdot, Cariñena, Touriga Nacional, Roussanne, Marsanne

FARMING

Practicing organic and biodynamic

HARVEST

Manual

CELLAR

Fermentation in stone lagars, varying amounts of whole clusters depending on the vintage and variety, manual pigeage, aging in concrete eggs and French oak foudres

A testament to the forethought and efforts Patricio and Alvaro put into locating and planting their vineyards came about in 2007 when Marcelo Retamal joined the project. Reta is the iconic winemaker of De Martino and a proponent of site expression, heritage vines, non-interventionist winemaking, as well as a pioneer of championing wines made outside of the Central Valley of Chile. From the first vintage each variety has been harvested by hand, fermented by indigenous yeasts in stone lagars and crushed by foot. The wines are then aged in concrete eggs or Stockinger foudre. These steps reveal and preserve the natural acidity and freshness innate to this mountain fruit. These are pure, vibrant and exciting wines – exactly the sort we couldn't pass up the opportunity to represent.

