

SANTA CAROLINA VERTICAL ICON & LIBRARY WINE TASTING

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SANTA CAROLINA
CHILE 1875

THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



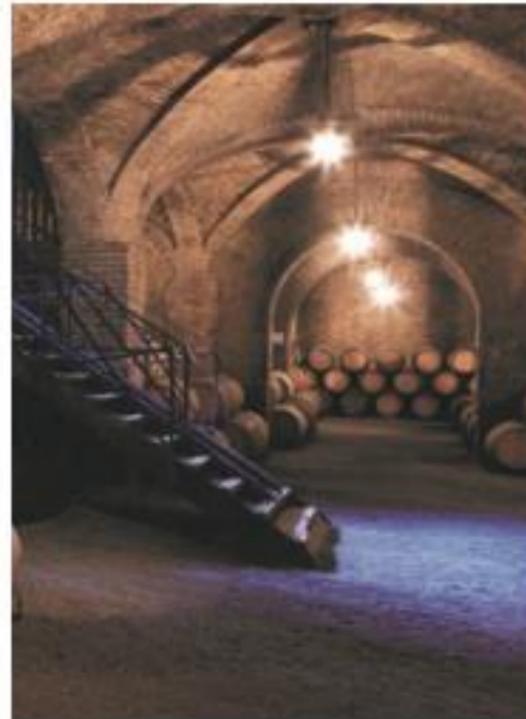
Santa Carolina Heritage Vertical 1959–2013 A revived Chilean style

Victoria Daskal reports on recent developments, including the discovery of old bottles and documents in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, and on a special tasting from which fellow taster Michael Schuster shares his notes

At an exclusive lunch in September 2017—at the Pollen Street Social restaurant in London, co-hosted by Santa Carolina's winemaker Andrés Caballero and Chilean wine expert Peter Richards MW—guests were treated to a one-of-a-kind vertical heritage tasting with a distinct purpose: to compare wines from the 1950s and '60s to a new

revival project breathing life back into a bygone style of Chilean wine. Richards set the stage for this "back-to-the-future" project with a whistle-stop tour of Chile's wine history. In the 1950s, when the *Miscke* was still marshland, *conquistadores* were already planting *Vitis vinifera* vines throughout Chile—Pais and Moscatel at first,

followed by Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Cabernet Sauvignon. Fast-forward to the 1990s, post-Pinochet, and Chile's wine production exploded, fueled by an exponential export demand. In 1989, Chile produced 400 million liters of wine, 7 percent of which was exported for a value of \$35 million. By 2009, the country was producing one billion liters



Besides preserving historic vines, Andrés Caballero has implemented many changes in the winery, reinventing the Santa Carolina style to reflect the mid-20th-century restraint

Unraveling grape varieties aimed at preserving and saving them in the hands of iron wine Luis Pizarro and experimental wine Tannos. The garden was established in 2009, when vines dating back to 1921 were carefully transplanted from Santa Carolina's foundation vineyard in Maipo, Santiago, to the Talcahuano Estate, in the Alto Cautín Valley. So far, 100 phylloxera-free vines materialized from 19 different varieties but three remain: a B-1 blend,

Besides the admirable strides made to research and preserve historic vines, Caballero has implemented many changes in the winery, reinventing the Santa Carolina style to reflect the mid-20th-century restraint they tasted in the bottles discovered in their hidden cellar. The hand-picked grapes are harvested a month earlier than current traditional harvests, with a yield of six tons per hectare (about two-thirds less than the level to which the yield had risen). Fermentation is spontaneous with indigenous yeast, and addition of acid is avoided. Maceration is short, followed by one year in oak barrels and another year in French oak casks. The first vintage of the new icon wine was 2011, and it is named Luis Pizarro for the founder of Santa Carolina.

If the lunch Caballero showed an exceptional selection of wines in bottles, those of the vintage concerned after the earthquake—1959, 1961, and 1962, Cabernet Sauvignon—which inspired the new style of Luis Pizarro starting with the 2011 and 2012 vintages. Part of the shift in philosophy involves a move away from drinking wines too young and the introduction, for the first time, of bottle aging at the winery. 70 percent of production is held back from release until the wine starts developing a more mature profile. Luis Pizarro retails for 1000 per bottle and is distributed through Domus in the UK.

THE TASTING

Pollen Street Social Restaurant, London
September 5, 2017

Santa Carolina Semillon 1962

Deep orange-gold, amber in effect; a fine bouquet, no longer recognizably Semillon as such but a combination of honey, flowers, and orange marmalade, clear cut, aromatic, and surprisingly zesty given its 50 years and more. It was also remarkably stable in the glass. A full bone-dry, vital wine, long, fine, and aromatic, a sort of very-old yet very-fresh Pilsner. Uniquely in style: long to taste, long to finish, with most distinct aroma and flavor ripe in its fruit core, neat-fringed and carefully in the sweet wine, fragrant, complete, individual and really quite lovely. A marvel—and it probably is needed—of just how good Semillon can be from Chile, where, up to the middle of the 20th century its plantings were significant. As thoroughly inadequate additional information: 1/10

Santa Carolina Cabernet Sauvignon 1964

Mature pale ruby; gently sweet, old-fashioned, faintly "herbal" bouquet, becoming more plummy and mouthcoated as it sat in the glass; a light, moderately concentrated wine with just a little dry,

delving toward still there; pure, delicate, freshly sweet, modest in complexity and gently persistent. A fine, old, top-tier boutique-quality level, still sweet in fruit, delicate yet, but with all its charm facilities there. The final of these three old reds, remarkably complete and delicious. I will give a score—but what does that add to the information or, more to the point, to the pleasure that this delightful 1964-60-year-old delivers? 1/10

Santa Carolina Cabernet Sauvignon 1962

Mature pale ruby, with very similar proportions to the 1964 but a touch more acidity to taste and similar, mostly resolved tannins. A leaner delicacy, this, lacking the sweetness and presence of the older wine, with good light length, but clearly wearing a little thin now; the flesh retreating from the bones. 1/10

Santa Carolina Cabernet Sauvignon 1964

Mature old ruby; a gentle, red-fruit bouquet, tinged with caramel, well sweet, and earthy, a medium-full wine with a fairly marked acidity and very light tannins. Here is a gentle red-fruit sweetness, but this is now lacking fruit at its heart and is relatively short to finish, with mainly its acid persisting. The driest of the three elderly reds, from the coolest of the three vintages. 1/10

Santa Carolina Reserva de Familia Cabernet Sauvignon 2007

Dark narrow-rimmed red starting to show a bit of maturity; sweet, fresh, not berry Cabernet fruit, with no excess sweet, full and fresh, still rightly cheery in its tannin feature; plenty of fruit, really quite elegant given the tannin that it still shows, moderate in complexity, but with nice, light weight, still feeling a little adolescent and a little dry. Featured at ten years, some was from full maturity if you prefer something more mellowed. Good to bouquet level. Drinkable now, better in another five years, and with no hurry then. 1/10

Santa Carolina Luis Pizarro Cabernet Sauvignon 2012

A very difficult business vintage, the hardest to pick, where it was a considerable challenge to make an apparently wine with moderate alcohol. Still a modest medium-weight, but on the nose, the very slightly herby/olive signature of more of Chile's elite, quite rich, yet also restrained, with a very subtle tannin and fresh natural acid, a particularly fine balance. Simply juicy Cabernet, really in focus, a graceful, rich, and complete wine, quality, mouth-coating, long across the palate, elegant, restrained, zesty, and with a lovely fruit fragrance persistence. Utterly without excess, deliciously fresh, and with no sense at all of a "best" vintage. *Undiscovered*, harmonious, complete, and lovely in its Magallanes style. Not youthful light, but with a great fruit heart and is relatively short to finish, with mainly its acid persisting. The driest of the three elderly reds, from the coolest of the three vintages. 1/10

Santa Carolina Luis Pizarro Cabernet Sauvignon 2013

A cool and rainy year for this more ambitious style. Dark, slick-rimmed red fruit, and somewhat more herby to smell, an elegant, slightly severe balance, medium-full, both to line, feely tannin, dry and fresh, slightly leaner in style, with a clear cooler gear authority, but with finesse, class, and length of finish, too. Not the scope of the 2012, but harmonious and subtle, very much in keeping with the style in mind. A notable effort in a very difficult year. I would leave this for at least 6-10 years, and I'm sure it will mellow and "loosen up" with considerable grace. 1/10

The 1959 shows the potential for this "newer" Cabernet Sauvignon style. And it is important to emphasize that this is definitely an expression of a style—regardless of whether you like it more than a hermit, and the 2012 Luis Pizarro shows the promise for this return to an ideal from the past. Santa Carolina is to be congratulated on this search for a new—or should that be a renewed—Chilean identity. When we see going to see a Luis Pizarro Semillon!

Photo: *Undiscovered*, Santa Carolina's post-2010 cellar. Caption: "Old bottles" discovered after the earthquake.