



THE BORDEAUX OF

CHILE



THE UNUSUAL VOYAGE OF A FRENCH GRAPE

By Franklin Reider

Like most wine lovers, I enjoy “discovering” new wines with wonderful tastes. The wine that has been the greatest discovery from opening GOL! The Taste of Brazil 18 months ago, is the Chilean wine Carmenere, whose origin is a fascinating tale.

Chile has been producing wine since the 1500s when Spanish settlers brought over vines to plant in this Latin American country. Through a combination of great soil and weather, and a lot of luck, the country was able to remain disease free until today. In addition, Chile has become known for its merlot as well as its production of inexpensive yet quality wines.

In the 1870s France’s Bordeaux region was devastated by an outbreak of phylloxera, a horrendous aphid that attacks the roots of vinifera vines, the species of the great European grapes. Several million acres of vineyards across Europe were destroyed. The plague spread to both Argentina and North America as well. Oddly, whether through luck, careful importation policies or the presence of the monumental Andes mountains, separating Chile from the East, no such plague hit the plantations of the

Chilean countryside.

Fortunately, this Bordeaux rootstock, carmenere, cabernet sauvignon and cabernet franc, had been planted in Chile, disease free, some 30 years prior to the European plague. When the French viniculturists replanted their grapes, carmenere was not among those chosen. Strangely, carmenere had been a difficult grape for the French environment, as it needed more heat than its counterparts, and even more problematic, it frequently caught “coulure”, a disease that caused grapes to drop prior to their being ripe, thereby causing them to be useless for wine production. With such complications, carmenere was discarded by the French.

However, Chile retains a wonderful climate, ideal for the longer ripening process that carmenere requires. The fame that Chile’s merlot achieved, unknown to its creators, was in great part Carmenere. In 1994, Jean Michel Boursiquot, a visiting French ampelographer (an expert in identifying and distinguishing vines) from the Universite de Montpellier decided to investigate the merlot plantings, and discovered the leaves of the carmenere

“The International community, led by the University of Montpellier officially accepted Chile’s Carmenere as a recognized wine category.”



Dive into The Blue Fish for totally awesome, award-winning sushi at Delray Beach's chic new eatery on Atlantic Avenue.

THE BLUE FISH
Japanese Restaurant & Lounge

110 East Atlantic Avenue, #100 | Delray Beach, Florida | 561.330.3474
Dinner is served nightly, from 5:00 p.m.; Lunch is served Wednesday through Saturday, 12:00 noon - 3:00 p.m., with 2-for-1 sushi; \$1 sake on Thursdays, \$5 martinis on Tuesdays.
www.thebluefishsushi.com

Getting TooJay's great food delivered to your next office luncheon is a piece of cake... a really rich, deep chocolate piece of cake.

TOOJAY'S
ORIGINAL GOURMET DELI
REAL. GOOD. FOOD.

Plantation • Coral Springs • Boynton Beach
Boca Raton • Lake Worth • Wellington • Palm Beach
Palm Beach Gardens • Stuart • Jupiter • Vero

grape. Three years of DNA testing confirmed that carmenere was alive and flourishing in Chile, in a manner superior to what it had ever done in France.

Many vineyards, when informed of this “new grape” present on their grounds for more than a century and a half, separated the plantings of carmenere from merlot and the Chilean government encouraged the branding of Carmenere. The International community, led by the University of Montpellier officially accepted Chile’s Carmenere as a recognized wine category.

Initially, carmenere continued to be blended with Cabernet and merlot, in the last few years, carmenere has been bottled on its own and has developed some wonderful wines.

In my personal opinion, the pure carmenere can be somewhat irregular, with the same producer in the same year having bottles that are spectacular and others of the same vintage more ordinary.

One of my favorite wines from Chile is a blend of merlot, carmenere and cabernet from the Vereamonte Vineyard called Primus. With a distinct French Bordeaux-like taste, Primus can be purchased for under \$20 and is a spectacular wine. Like many fine Latin wines it is not yet found in many restaurants, but its presence on a wine list demonstrates that the owners have gone the extra mile to bring creative and delicious wines to their clientele at a fair price. All wine lovers should “discover” their favorite. *Carmenere!*

—Franklin Reider is the proprietor of *GOL! THE TASTE OF BRAZIL* in Delray Beach and created the wine list that won the award of excellence from *WINE SPECTATOR* magazine.