

Vinalu[®]

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*Vinalu visit to Cooperativa Agrícola Pisquera Elqui
Limitada /Chile*

*Mercedes Benz C 300 Break
Test-drive*

Boutique Hotel Refugio El Molle in Vicuña

VINALU Special Report Chile Part IV

*by Liliane Turmes, Helen Latour
and Harry Montagnola'*

pictures by Liliane Turmes

'VALLE DEL ELQUI', THE MAGICAL VALLEY

In the last part of our Chile report, we visit the Elqui Valley, 400 km North of Santiago and 300 km at the Southern end of the Atacama desert.

Valle del Elqui, located between the cities of La Serena and Vicuña, in the Coquimbo region, is world famous for astrotourism and for pisco.

The so called 'Magical Valley', with the clearest skies of the planet, with no light pollution at night, with the amazing 'Ruta de las Estrellas', the route of the stars, is visited by aficionados the whole year over for skywatching from the many observatories, with powerful telescopes, up in the mountains. Some of them, like Tololo, are for scientific research only.

Besides the fantastic skies, the Elqui Valley is widely known for its 'Pisco Route'. Vinalu had the pleasure to be guided by Javier Marcos and Patricio Azócar, both from the Pisco Capel company, through the 'Chico Norte'. The climate of this region has a unique character, as the grapes ripen in dry and very hot weather conditions, with winds coming from the Andes and with a strong influence of the Pacific, with sea mists, bringing an important moisture to the vineyards. The climate is sub-desertic, with no cloud formation and with only 200 mm of annual rainfall and so the main source of water comes from irrigation. The water, with a high quality, is collected from the thaws up in the Andes and then used in a dropping irrigation system. As we are told, the watering system existed already in the Inca Empire time and nowadays you still can see green vegetation lines up in the mountains. The grounds are sandy and poor and so the roots of the vines are searching the water in the depth, nevertheless 90% have to be watered. Due to the geographical latitude, region III (Atacama) and region IV (Coquimbo) have the best quality of grapes for the pisco production. Both regions are at the same latitude as Bento Gonçalves,

Welcome to Elqui Valley by...



an excellent wine region in Brazil (Editor's note : Vinalu will be reporting in 2024 about this outstanding Brazilian wine region).

PISCO, THE MAGICAL BRANDY

In 1931, the name pisco is allowed in Chile for grape brandies, produced exclusively in Atacama and Coquimbo, regions with an official D.O., Denomination of Origin.

In Chile the regulations for the production of pisco are high, with only 5 varieties authorized, such as the fragrant Muscat types Moscatel de Austria, Moscatel de Alexandria, Moscatel Rosada and the more delicate varieties as Pedro Jiménez and Torontel. After the fermentation, the pure grape juice is distilled in copper alembics and then the proof alcohol is reduced with water to lower the alcohol to 40%. The last process consists in refrigeration to minus 8° Celsius, before bottling, which makes the spirit again softer. In Chile the aging in wooden barrels is permitted.

Although the place of origin of the pisco is often debated between Chile and Peru, mainly because of their national pride and identity, it is quite obvious, that due to different production processes and different grape varieties allowed, the taste of the pisco differs from one country to the other.

VISIT AT CAPEL THE COOPERATIVA AGRICOLA PISQUERA ELQUI LIMITADA

The history of Capel started in 1938, when the 'Cooperativa Agrícola Pisquera Elqui Limitada' was founded. The foundation of the cooperative resulted from the economic world crisis of 1929, which made, that at the end 1000 producers of the Atacama and Coquimbo region united to face this huge challenge. Today the following generations are working within the 'Cooperativa', which is the most important in Chile and also one of the biggest 'Cooperativas of Destilados' in the world. Together they cultivate 3200 ha of pisco grapes. The Limari Valley, South of La Serena and Coquimbo is the biggest pisco producing area, whereas Elqui Valley is recognized for the highest quality grapes with zones at different altitudes.

Javier Marcos, Francesco Peralta & Patricio Azócar





*Huge trucks bringing the grapes
on the scales...*



The subtel Pedro Jiménez grape



*Copper alembic for
the distillation*



THE TASTING AT CAPEL

Patricio Azócar, the director de enologia at Capel introduced us to an impressive way of tasting the piscos: After a sip of water, sniffing coffee beans, smelling the aromas of the piscos, eating a bit of the cookies prepared with different ingredients, matching with the selected piscos finally tasting the piscos...

- 1) Capel Doble Destilado transparente, Pedro Jiménez grapes
Colour: Light and brilliant
On the nose: Anise and herbs
On the palate: smooth, sweet and bitter
- 2) Alto Del Carmen Reservado transparente (Alto Del Carmen is the premium label of Capel)
Moscatel de Alexandria and Moscatel Rosado, double distilled
Colour: Light and brilliant
On the nose: Flowers, roses
On the palate: Citrus fruits, light, medium long
- 3) Alto del Carmen Reservado,
Moscatel de Alexandria and Moscatel Rosado, 9 months in American oak
Colour: Light amber
On the nose: Vanilla and honey
On the palate: Complex, long, dried fruits, soft tannins
- 4) Alto del Carmen Etiqueta Negra
Moscatel Rosado, aged 2 years in American oak
Colour: Brilliant amber
On the nose: Toasted notes, vanilla, caramel
On the palate: Elegant, candied fruits, smooth, in a long finish
- 5) Alto del Carmen Conde, Moscatel de Alexandria, Moscatel Rosado from zonas altas , double distilled, 36 months in American and French oak
Colour: Light golden, amber
On the nose: violets, flowers
On the palate: long, complex
- 6) Monte Fraile, Moscatel de Austria grapes from high altitude, 3 to 7 years in American and French oak
Colour: Dark amber
On the nose: Incens, vanilla, soft toasted wood
On the palate: Smooth, soft tannins, ripe dried fruits.

Address:
Cooperativa Capel
Vicuña, Camino a Peralillo s/n Region de Coquimbo

Piscos selected for the tasting





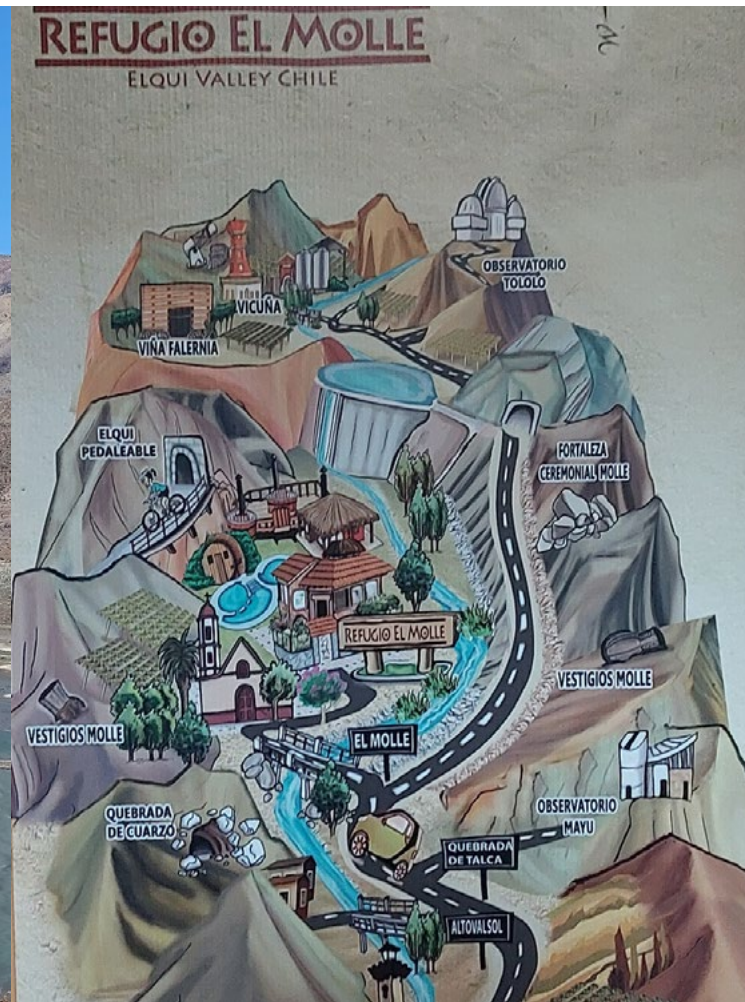
Cheers! Liliane Turmes and Patricio Azócar

Table prepared for the tasting

CHARMING REFUGIO EL MOLLE in VALLE DEL ELQUI



Elqui Valley, kitesurfers' paradise



Location of Boutique Hotel Refugio El Molle



An oasis of peace...

The charming boutique hotel 'Refugio El Molle' is located near the city of La Serena in the breathtaking nature of the Valle Del Elqui.

In the year 2000, the family owned business started with only one restaurant. Nowadays the complex on 60000 sqm consists of a hotel with exclusive Chilean style furnished rooms and self catering bungalows. Guests can benefit from the sensorial gardens and the pools with natural source water. A perfect retreat also for meditation and yoga in a peaceful surrounding. Unfortunately we did not have the time for these pleasant amenities because our program in La Serena continued the day after...

As our young and lovely hosts Maximiliano Miranda Aoun, the owner's son, and Mayeul Guibourd from France told us, Refugio is also appreciated by international travellers for the stargazing, as the hotel offers special guided tours to the observatories, with exciting astronomical experiences. In the huge parc and garden almonds, grapefruits, quinces, oranges, figs and vegetables are grown, which are then served in the kitchen of the restaurant 'Los Hornitos del Molle'. The chef Patricio Aoun, Maximiliano's uncle, is well known for his traditional and international cuisine, based on local products and combined with wines and piscos from the region.

Besides their public relation qualities, Maximiliano and Mayeul have the talent of brewing beer in their own artisanal microbrewery on the site of the Refugio hotel. The 'Ruta 41' beer is brewed evidently with the purest water coming from the mountains and elaborated with fruits from their orchards and of course served in their restaurant.

For the dinner in Los Hornitos del



... and calm



With a cosy fire place for cold nights



Molle, the chef choose three wines from Limari and Elqui Valley. The Dalbosco Gran Reserva 2020 from Limari Valley, a fruity and powerfull wine , a blend of Syrah, Carménère and Cabernet Sauvignon with black fruits on the nose and backing plums on the palate, the Falernia Gran Reserva 2019, a single varietal Carménère from Valle del Elqui, a harmonious wine with ripe red fruits and salty notes at the finish and the Cavas del Valle 2020, with 4 varietals from Valle del Elqui, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Syrah and Merlot, an organic wine with black fruits and with a good acidity. We enjoyed them with the tastefull gyozas, filled with crispy shrimps, the savory tartare of delicate Ecuadorian shrimps and a delicious grilled tuna, served with vegetables from their garden. After the dinner we had the pleasure to discover the home made beer 'Ruta 41'.

Address:
Refugio El Molle
Balmaceda, El Molle
Vicuña, Coquimbo, Chile



Wines of the region for the dinner



Mayeul and Maximiliano our hosts

LA SERENA, THE LIGHT HOUSE CITY



Tololo beach at La Serena



Pueblita Penuelas, artisanal market



Restaurant Tololo, colourful and...

After our stay at the amazing Refugio El Molle boutique hotel, we were invited to a visit of the city of La Serena, 470 km northwards of Santiago, to introduce us to different important social projects. La Serena is known for its original neo colonial design and its imposing construction of 'Faro Monumental' the national monument Light House, built in 1950 and for its Avenida del Mar, with 7 km of beautiful beaches.

And due to this location near to the Pacific Ocean, the city inherited a culinary tradition, based on the best products historically coming from the sea. Some of the favorite dishes are the Parmesan Chilean Razor Clams, the crab pies and the local fish specialities. Evidently La Serena has a tight connection with the pisco history of the Valle del Elqui, as already in the 16th century the first grapes for the pisco production were picked here, in the middle of the city. And not to forget that La Serena is the gateway to the astronomic tourism in the Elqui Valley. Marie Antonieta, our guide, presented us the 'Edudown' project, helping young people with the Down Syndrom to be integrated in the society, by giving them jobs, mainly in the restaurant business, what apparently works perfectly and also the 'Pueblia Peñuelas' market, with artisanal products , gastronomy and culture, supporting craftsmen from the region.

Before our trip back to Santiago, we enjoyed a mouthwatering seafood platter, with rare sweet and salty tasting sea urchins, Tuna fish and Salmon from Puerto Montt, presented by the chef Luis Sepulvera at the Tololo beach restaurant, served with a fruity Pisco Mango Sour.



... extravagant



And with an astonishing wine wall



The chef Luis Sepulvera with our guides

Address of Tololo Beach restaurant
Av. del Mar 5200
1710620 La Serena / Coquimbo

VISIT TO VIÑA SANTA MÓNICA



View into the Andes from ...



Viña Santa Mónica

Viña Santa Mónica is located in Rapel Valley, 5 km Southwest of the city of Rancagua and 90 km South of Santiago. The valley is named after 'Rapel' river, which divides the region into two sub-regions Cachapoal in the East, towards the Andes and Colchagua in the West, towards the Pacific Ocean. It is a warm and dry region, flanked by the Andes and the coastal ranges, with many microclimates, with rain in the winter and cool winds from the Andes in the summer, cooling down the night temperatures, benefic for the production of high quality wines. The soil in Rapel is mainly volcanic.

In 1976 Emilio de Solminihac, an agricultural engineer of the University of Chile and enologist of the University of Bordeaux bought Viña Purisima and renamed it, as an honour to his wife, in Viña Santa Mónica, with the idea of producing fine wines.

In the 83 ha winery, harvest is done by hand.

Sylvia Cava, the public relation manager of Viña Santa Mónica, a dear friend of Vinalu since many years, organized the visit for us, also to make us discover the extraordinary aging potential of Chilean wines.

We enjoyed the tasting in a warm and familiar atmosphere, with the daughter and granddaughter of Don Emilio, on the terrasse of their charming Adobe house.



Vineyards of Santa Mónica



Old vintages for the tasting

We particularly liked:

The Tierra de Sol Chardonnay 2002, with a straw colour, stone fruits on the nose and with ripe yellow fruits on the palate, with a long finish and a good structure and the Gran Reserva Chardonnay 2002, with aromas of herbs and creamy on the palate;

The Tierra de Sol Merlot 1999, with the freshness of red currents on the nose and on the palate and the Tierra del Sol Merlot 2000, with a bouquet of herbs and menthol and plums on the palate;

The Tierra de Sol Cabernet Sauvignon 1996, with a nice acidity and very fruity and the Gran Reserva Cabernet Sauvignon 2000 with ripe fruits and with a long aftertaste;

The 1995 Riesling, still very lively, with the freshness of citrus fruits,, smoked notes and flintstone on the palate;

The 2016 Riesling, with a clear yellow brilliant colour with a mineral bouquet, ripe abricots and light bitternotes in the mouth.

Address: Viña Santa Mónica Ltda
Camino Doñihue Km 5-Casilla353-
Rancagua Chile



*Emilio de Solminihac & family
with Sylvia Cava*



Riesling tasting with Emilio de Solminihac

Mercedes-Benz C 300 de Break AMG Line:

Arbeitstier mit blauem Blut

von Sully Prud'homme

(alle Fotos: Mercedes-Benz)



V I N A L U

Früher war das T-Modell der C-Klasse im allgemeinen Straßenverkehr das Arbeitstier schlechthin. Viele gut situierte Handwerker von einst schwürten auf die Vorzüge dieses Kombis, mit dem sich Farbeimer, Leitern, Kabelrollen oder Backwaren problemlos transportieren liessen: ein unkompliziertes und zuverlässiges Fahrzeug mit großer Heckklappe, bodenständigen Leistungen und abwaschbarem Innenraum, aber mit den Qualitätsanmutungen des Sterns.

Im Laufe der Jahre hat sich die Existenzgrundlage dieses Allrounders allerdings immer weiter den Gepflogenheiten der Fahrer angepasst. Erst wurde das T-Modell zum schicken Lifestyle-Kombi für Ausflüge in den Beruf und in die Oper, jetzt ist die nächsten Stufe der Metamorphose erreicht.

Wenn ein T-Modell zum vornehmen Break mutiert, wenn der hauseigene Veredler AMG seine feingliedrigen Finger mit im Spiel hat, wenn standardweiss als Wagenfarbe abgelöst wird von vornehmem Mattgrau und sich unter der Haube die modernste Hybridtechnologie einnistet, dann wird aus der einstigen fleissigen Alltagsraupe ein prächtiger, vornehmer Schmetterling, der seine Flügel ausbreitet und auf der verbrennerunterstützten Elektrowelle dahinschwingt.

Ein Vierzylinder-Turbodiesel mit 2 Litern Hubraum, 9-Gang-Wandlerrautomatik und einer Leistungsausbeute von 197 PS in Systemeinheit mit einem Elektromotor mit 129 PS erlauben eine maximale Systemleistung von 313 PS und 750 Nm Drehmoment auf die Hinterachse, eine Kraft, auf die Latex-Farbeimer und Dachschindeln ganz schön neidisch sind, doch sie kommen hier nicht mehr rein! Der Sprint von 0 auf 100 km/h in 6,2 s und die Höchstgeschwindigkeit von 240 km/h war zu seligen Handwerkerzeiten lediglich protzigen Sportwagen vorbehalten, in denen ja auch keine Arbeitsutensilien

durch die Kurven geschleudert wurden. Der Verbrauch im Drittmix pendelt sich laut Herstellerangaben bei 5,4 l/100 km ein.

Die Batterie befindet sich unter dem Kofferraumboden, wodurch dieser etwas höher baut als bei den C-Klasse-Brüdern, trotzdem reicht der Stauraum noch immer für 10 profane Getränkekästen und die damit verbundene Entweihung des Edelkombis, bei edlen Weinen verhält dies sich natürlich gegenteilig: Das Modell kann dreiphasig Wechselstrom mit 11 kW laden und kann mit bis zu 55 kW in weniger als 30 Minuten schnellaufgeladen werden. Damit erreicht das Auto eine elektrische Reichweite von bis zu 110 km, was hierzulande reichen dürfte, um den kostbaren Dieselvorrat im Tank gar nicht erst anzurühren, vorausgesetzt das Auto geht regelmäßig ans Netz.

Die AMG Line bereichert den edlen Break im Exterieur unter anderem um eine spezielle Frontschürze mit sportlich-markanten Lufteinlässen, Rautengitter und Chromzerelementen, eine Heckschürze in Diffusor-Optik mit Einsatz in Wagenfarbe, eine Dachreling aus Aluminium und AMG-Seitenschwellerverkleidungen. Im Innenraum gibt es unter anderem ein Multifunktionslenkrad in Nappaleder, eine Lenkradblende und Schalt paddles in Silberchrom, daneben Sitze mit sportlicher Sitzgraphik und neu gestalteten Kopfstützen sowie eine spezielle Ambiente-Beleuchtung. Zu beanstanden für große Hände ist allerdings die teilweise fummelige Bedienung verschiedener Knöpfe und Schalter am Multifunktionslenkrad.

Der Listenpreis des von uns gefahrenen Testfahrzeugs C300de Break AMG Line liegt bei 67.860.-Euro ttc (Stand Dezember 2023). Wir danken MB Belgien und Merbag Luxembourg für die Bereitstellung des Testfahrzeugs.



V I N A L U

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