



Chilean sustainability could teach us a lot



Blake Creedon
grapevine

IT WAS with uncanny timing that winemaker Adolfo Hurtado popped into Ireland for a quick tour to meet customers and members of the media this week. The front man with Chile's Cono Sur arrived just as the last details were being put in place in the drastic four-year plan which is intended to plug the chasm between spending and earning, and fund the state's bailout of financial institutions. If there is a single word that sums up our bubble behaviour (buying things we didn't need with money we didn't have) it is the term 'unsustainable'.

Which is where Cono Sur comes in. Cono Sur is best known to Irish wine fans as a source of solid good value wines — and particularly for its relatively recent innovation, a super pinot noir range so well made that arguably it single-handedly changed the way the world sees Chilean wine. Along the way, Cono Sur has built up enormous export markets and is now Chile's second largest wine concern after Concha y Toro.

But there is another string to their bow: Sustainability. One of the most influential of a band of young Chilean winemaking stars, Adolfo Hurtado began building sustainability into the very fabric of Cono Sur's operations all of 12 years ago, beginning by putting in place the Integrated Vineyard Management which ultimately led to fully-fledged organic certification two years later.

In subsequent years the winery has jumped through considerable hoops to win ISO and other recognised bodies for sustainability, and for reducing and offsetting carbon emissions.

Such conservation sits well with Chile's conservatism, according to Hurtado. His people, he said, were likely to be well served by being conservative and — using a word that long ago went out of fashion here — humble.

Is that a reason to drink Cono Sur?

I would suggest not. But the wines and their great value prices are pretty compelling. To take but one grape, Hurtado's pinot noirs helped liberate wine enthusiasts who had believed the hype that the delicate grape could only be grown properly by posh parts of France and New Zealand. For that inspirational example alone — achieved by steady progress rather than the explosion of "investment" — we are in debt to Adolfo Hurtado. Let's go check out some of his wines.

stockists

■ **The Cono Sur varietal range** including the basic sauvignon blanc featured above is available at Bradleys, O'Driscolls, O'Sullivan's, Barry's, Fine Wines Group nationwide, all good independent off licences, Dunnes / Supervalu / Centra / Tesco.

■ **Cono Sur Organic Cabernet Sauvignon Carmenera** is available at Harvest Off Licence Galway, O'Rourke's Newbridge Co Kildare, Next Door Salthill Galway and all good independent off licences.

■ **The Cono Sur Reserva range** is available in Dunnes Stores and Selected Supervalu, Fine Wines Group Nationwide, Independent Off Licences including - O'Driscolls, Redmonds of Ranelagh, Blue Note off Licence Galway, Eldon's Off Licence Clonmel, Griffins Off Licence Ennis, Ryan's Off licence Cong Co Mayo, O'Keefe's Off Licence Kilcock Co Kildare, Blessings Off Licence Cavan



Cono Sur Reserva Sauvignon Blanc 2009 €10.99. It draws on grapes grown at the extremes of Chile, from the chilly Bio-Bio region in the deep south and Casablanca Valley in the north. The resulting contrasts between warm aromatic tropical fruit and zingy acidic make this a vibrant lively wine — at a great value price.



Cono Sur Pinot Noir 2009 (€9.99). Right from the get-go this is a very impressive wine — its beautiful translucent cherry colour matched by its youthful cherry aromas attended by the tiniest touch of fragrant fresh coffee. To hell with posh expensive wine: Excellence at modest prices is most impressive and this is it.



Cono Sur Reserva Pinot Noir

(€11.99). A step up from the basic pinot but by no means eclipsing it, this is a smooth and fragrant pinot augmented by lengthy stay in oak.