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## WEINWIRTSCHAFT

### LOS VASCOS



An impressive vastness: With an expanse of 590 hectares, Los Vascos owns one of Chile's largest single vineyards.

### Franco-Basque pioneer works

For many years Los Vascos was almost the only well-known Chilean wine in Germany. With the growing export success of other Chilean producers, Los Vascos lost this dominant position but not their business, as their exports to Germany did not even faintly decline. In recent years, Los Vascos has been Chile's third largest exporter of bottled wines to Germany. *By Jürgen Mathäß*

Over 20 years ago, wine mail order company Hawesko introduced Los Vascos' Cabernet Sauvignon to Germany. Back then, their managing director explained the motifs behind what appeared like a completely exotic order at the time to the former editor in chief of this magazine: "We don't have enough Lafite. We had to order this wine from Chile in order to get more Lafite." Upon inquiring how the Chilean expedition was doing two years later, our editor received the following reply: "Incredible! A smash hit! We never expected this." With an export share of far more than 50% Los Vascos has dominated the import of Chilean wines for close to a decade – until others followed.

The owners of the Colchagua Valley finca have always been pioneers. In the 16th century, Spanish conquistadores introduced vineyards to northern Chile. The production expanded rapidly and the land soon became an export country – much the chagrin of the winemakers at home in Spain. The Basque Echenique family planted their vines in the Colchagua Valley around 1750. They played a part in the expansion of winegrowing that took place in Chile during the 19th century on the initiative

of a handful of pioneers. These admirers of the French lifestyle introduced French grape varieties to the country. When the European vineyards were ravaged by a phylloxera plague, wine production in Chile experienced a dramatic boost : from 9.000 hectares in 1870 to 40.000 hectares in 1900. Chile established itself as a wine exporter to Europe. In 1947, the wine production in the Cañeten Valley at Peralillo was restructured and modernized. The "Cañetenes" wines resulting from this change soon made a name for themselves. Over the course of the Allende presidency, the estate experienced a number of severe setbacks. So, piece by piece, the longstanding owners decided to transfer it to the Domaines Barons de Rothschild (Lafite), who took over the "Los Vascos estate" (Los Vascos means "The Basques") in 1988. Back then, the Finca had a size of 2.200 hectares, with 220 hectares of vineyards. Lafite's pioneering commitment in Chile resulted mainly from their extensive research into the potential of the wines of the Andes country, and they finally resolved on Los Vascos because of its closeness to the sea and its exceptional terroirs.



## The Wines

Cabernet Sauvignon 3 million bottles.  
Grande Reserve (mainly Cabernet, also Malbec, Syrah, Carménère), 0.9 million bottles.  
Le Dix (85% Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, Carménère), 60,000 to 90,000 bottles.  
Chardonnay, 0.5 million bottles.  
Sauvignon Blanc, 180,000 bottles.  
Rosé, 50,000 bottles.  
Cabernet Sauvignon "Brisandes", 350,000 bottles.  
Cabernet Sauvignon "Las Huertas", 350,000 bottles.  
Le Dix is aged 16 to 18 months in French oak barrels (75% new). Grande Reserve is aged 12 months in 60% new barrels. The Bodega has 800 Barriques. The simple Cabernet Sauvignon is not matured in wood.

Los Vascos profits from ideal weather conditions, extensive exposure to sunlight, sufficient water sources, semi-arid soils and a low risk of frost. At an average of 130 metres above sea level and situated only 40 kilometres away from the Pacific Ocean, the micro-climate at the Viña Los Vascos has everything required to create great wines.

Both in the vineyard and in the cellars extensive investments were necessary. Between the years 1983 and 1994, the technical director at Château Lafite Rothschild submitted Los Vascos to considerable changes. The vineyards were restructured, new plantings were conducted and the yields reduced. Nonetheless, they are still at a level of 10,000 litres per hectare for the simple Cabernet Sauvignon today. Well-drilling secured abundant amounts of water. A weather station was installed in the vineyard and the cellars were extended and modernized step by step.

With its single vineyard of 590 hectares situated in the heart of a hacienda with a total 3,600 hectares, Los Vascos owns one of the largest single vineyards in Chile. The increasing age of the vines and the improvements implemented on the cellars made it possible to raise the quality and to produce wines of the highest standards, such as Los Vascos Grande Reserve and Le Dix de Los Vascos. As a final highlight, a new guesthouse in the traditional Chilean style of construction was erected.

For a transitional period the vines had to grow and age. But gradually, enough vineyards became mature enough to fully express the valuable terroir. Accompanying the viña's flagship, Cabernet Sauvignon, this development led to the production of a Grande Reserve for the first time in 1999, the cuvée Le Dix. In the same period of time the distribution of wines increased, both in numbers as well as spread. In 2012 5.5 million bottles were distributed to more than 50 countries. Today, the USA is the most important export market, followed by Germany, China, Switzerland and Japan. Last year, almost 70,000 bottles were exported to Germany, still distributed by Hawesko and CWD.



With this result, Los Vascos now ranks in the third place of the Chilean bottled wine exporters to Germany. With the growing distribution, the prestige of the Los Vascos brand grew as well. This is so, because the proportion of premium wines could also be increased. The decision to switch to trickle irrigation in the vineyards and to expand the grape varieties brought more expression, balance and complexity to the entire product range. Today, their great expectations in the terroir have been fully realised, the French owners of Los Vascos explain. However, this is not the end in the development of the estate. At the far edge of the hills a new and valuable terrain has been discovered and is currently developed.

## A singular vineyard

The vineyard lies at the foot of Mount Cañeten at a latitude of 34° 30' and a longitude of 71° 30', 40 km away from the Pacific Ocean and 200 km Southwest of the Chilean capital Santiago.

At 590 hectares it is the largest single vineyard in the Colchagua Valley. These 590 hectares of vineyard area are covered by sandy loom soils and granite, both of volcanic origin. Grape varieties are Cabernet Sauvignon (85%), Carménère (5%), Syrah (4%), Malbec (1%) and Chardonnay (5%). The vines are between 15 and 70 years old. Sauvignon Blanc and a part of the Chardonnays are purchased under long-term contracts from the cooler regions along the Pacific coast (Casablanca and Leyda) as well as the foot of the Andes.