

Staying Cool with Chile's Adolfo Hurtado

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Adolfo Hurtado prefers to keep things cool—in his vineyards, that is. As head winemaker at the rapidly growing [Viña Cono Sur](#), Hurtado has made the winery's focus cool-climate vineyards, as well as varietals such as Sauvignon Blanc, Riesling, Pinot Noir, Viognier and Syrah.

It's a recipe that seems to be bringing the 38-year-old some success. Since entering the U.S. market in 2006, exports are up to nearly 180,000 cases annually—impressive and rapid growth. That may be because Hurtado timed the move to the U.S. market perfectly, just ahead of a sour economy that has forced many wine drinkers to look for value. That makes Cono Sur's multitude of wines priced in the \$10 to \$15 range attractive buys right now. Of course, quality needs to be in the bottle to keep those customers coming back, and so far the track record for Cono Sur is very consistent.

I sat down with Hurtado at my office today to get caught up on his latest projects. Turns out he's been a rather busy guy since [my last sit down with him](#). Hurtado has overseen the development of 450 additional hectares (1 hectare = 2.47 acres) of vines during the past two years, all of which are farmed organically. By 2013, Cono Sur plans to have over 1,300 hectares of vines in full production, with an emphasis on [Chile's cooler growing wine valleys](#), including the Bío Bío, Leyda, Casablanca, Limarí and Aconcagua valleys.

Now, if you've been paying attention to my coverage, that last valley might seem out of place. Aconcagua (perhaps best known as the home of [Viña Errázuriz](#)) is hardly known for its cool climate. But Hurtado is nonetheless putting in 100 hectares of vines at the eastern end of the valley, on slopes formed by the foothills of the Andes that extend up to 1,000 meters of elevation. This should drop the daytime temperatures by about 10 degrees F from those on the valley floor. Combined with cooler nights, the San Felipe vineyard has little in common with the bulk of Aconcagua's warmer vineyards.

I asked him about the surprising location, and if he preferred working with fruit from warmer vintages in cooler areas (such as Bío Bío) or cooler spots in generally warm areas (such as the new plantings in Aconcagua).

"They're different. Different varieties," he said. "Bío Bío is Sauvignon Blanc and Riesling. Aconcagua is Cabernet, so you can't compare the two. What I really prefer is cooler vintages that are dry, assuming you have the right varieties in the right place. Always cooler vintages."

Along with the Cabernet Sauvignon, Hurtado is putting in a wide range of varieties in the new Aconcagua vineyard, including Grenache, Syrah, Carignane and more. It's a grand experiment for Hurtado, who has nothing to go on but a hunch.

"There are no other vineyards in this area, only table grapes," said Hurtado. "So I have no

idea what to expect. It could be special or it could be totally average."

Hurtado plans to farm this new site biodynamically, also an ambitious undertaking considering the size of the vineyard.

"We work organically all the time," said Hurtado with a shrug. "So biodynamics isn't that difficult. It's just organics with some extra things thrown in."

It's a quietly cool approach that befits Hurtado's penchant for cool climates. In an increasingly warmer world, Hurtado is quietly working on the cool viticultural frontiers of Chile, and making some very good wine at a very good price.

For more on Chile, reference my last two annual tasting reports: "[Chile's One-Two Punch](#)" (May 31) and "[Chile Returns To Its Roots](#)" (May 15, 2008), both of which look at the several hundred wines tasted during the 12-month period leading up to each report.