

THE BERLIN TASTING NYC

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Vina Errazuriz Kai 2006 Takes The Prize At The Berlin Tasting - New York 2010

by Douglas Harrington



The distinguished panel that lead the blind tasting consisted of Michael Quinttus, Eduardo Chadwick, Steven Spurrier and Vina Errazuriz' Chief Winemaker Francisco Baettig. *(Douglas Harrington)*



Sparks Steakhouse wine buyer Carlo Cungo carefully rates the wines

New York City - It should not be news to anyone that over the past decade Chilean wine has garnered its fair share of the international wine market, however, last week in Manhattan they once again took on their European and Napa competitors for bragging rights and once again, Chile took home the prize.

Many bulk producers of good, fairly priced table wine can claim responsibility for the meteoric rise in Chile's worldwide sales. What may surprise many oenophiles is that there are several premium houses in Chile that not only stand up to the French First Growths, Tuscan superstars and Napa standouts, but have surpassed them at several international blind tastings.

The standout of these pedigree Chilean estates is Vina Errazuriz, who first threw down the gauntlet at the historical Berlin Tasting of 2004. Established in 1870 with imported French vines by founder **Don Maximiano Errazuriz** at the foot of Mount Aconcagua, the highest peak in the Western Hemisphere, the vineyards are nestled between the trade winds of the Pacific Ocean and the Andes Mountains. The combination essentially creates a Mediterranean climate and the perfect conditions for the ancient, imported French vines.

Repeating his historic 1976 Paris Tasting where California wines took the prize in both the red and white categories over legendary French First Growths, renowned *Decanter Magazine* editor, consultant and wine merchant **Steven Spurrier** created a similar scenario in Berlin in 2004 for Vina Errazuriz to take its place among the world's great wines. A truly blind tasting of 2000 and 2001 vintages judged by many of the world's foremost wine journalists, sommeliers and merchants, it was anyone's guess as to the outcome and risky business indeed for the proud Chilean vineyard.



Over 70 wine industry professionals participated in The Berlin Tasting - New York 2010 at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Manhattan.

Errazuriz' **Eduardo Chadwick**, president of the fifth generation family estate and the great-great-great grandson of its founder, could not have been happier with the results of the 2004 Berlin Tasting as his Vinedo Chadwick 2000 and Sena 2001 (co-produced with Robert Mondavi) placed first and second over a 2000 Chateau Lafite and the Sena 2000 tied for fourth place with a 2001 Chateau Margaux.

Not resting on its laurels, Errazuriz reenacted the Berlin Tasting in Toronto and Tokyo in 2006 and in London in 2009. Although no first place finish was taken at these tastings, Errazuriz placed four to five wines in the top 10 in each of the tastings.



Securely bagged, the tasting was indeed truly blind.

That all changed this week at the Berlin Tasting - New York 2010, held at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel on Columbus Circle. In the blind tasting of 10 red wines, Errazuriz' Kai 2006 was voted first with top honors, followed by an Opus One 2006 and a Chateau Haut-Brion 2006 that finished in third place. Over 70 industry professionals participated in the tasting.

Particularly interesting to the event result is that Kai, which in the native Chilean language simply means plant, is made from 87 per cent Carmènere grape. This particular grape, like most, was almost completely destroyed during the late-19th century Phylloxera blight that devastated the French wine industry. Never really resurrected in Europe, this long-lost grape variety from Bordeaux, Carmènere is quickly becoming the signature grape of Chile and certainly has staked its claim as one of the world's great varietals with its win in Manhattan this week.

I asked Spurrier to comment on the Chilean win, "I am surprised and very pleased for Eduardo that his Kai came in first, because it is a Carmènere and that is Chile's calling card. I am not surprised and also very pleased for Opus One, because that is a seamless wine, a very beautifully made wine. I didn't put it quite as high as that [second], but I have always admired it. The fact that Haut-Brion came in third, we actually had a less good bottle up here, we didn't like the Haut-Brion, but I just had another taste and it is a very, very good wine. The excitement is that Eduardo's wine came in first. I think it is an accolade for something that is a new idea. Wine shouldn't just be traditional; wine should be full of new ideas."



The 10 reds that were considered at the tasting along with the Errazuriz offerings included French First Grows, Tuscan superstars and a Napa standout.

Panel moderator and Errazuriz exclusive U.S. distributor, Vintus Wine founder **Michael Quinttus**, explained to me that Carmènere was brought to Chile along with other French vines in the mid-1800s and flourished. It was not replanted by Bordeaux vintners after the blight because it ripened late during the French rainy season. Apparently the Chilean wine makers didn't really know what they had with this particular grape, "In Chile, until the mid-1990s, Chileans thought it was Merlot because the grapes look so similar. They were harvesting it along with the regular Merlot which is an earlier ripening grape, whereas Carmènere is a late ripening grape. Once they found out where the Carmènere vines really were, then they started ripening it later and now it is making spectacular wines."

Among the many industry professionals at the event was Sparks Steakhouse wine buyer **Carlo Cungo** and I asked him how he liked the event, "I loved it, beautiful, a great experience! So now we are going to buy more Chilean wine." Cungo told me he presently carries 15 Chilean wines on his extensive list. I asked him how many Long Island wines he carried and sadly he informed me, "None. We just really have not gotten a chance [to consider them], we have such a big wine list, 2,000 bottles, but we will see." I asked him what Long Island vintners need to do to create better exposure in Manhattan, "I think it is a little more marketing and also a lot of wine tastings. Bring it to the people, bring it into the market. They need to do a little bit more."



An elated Eduardo Chadwick holds up his winning Vina Errazuriz Kai 2006.

A lesson can certainly be learned from the likes of Chilean producers like Eduardo Chadwick, who not only aggressively markets his product (perhaps with more support from the Chilean government than our winemakers receive from New York State), but is willing to stand toe-to-toe with European and Napa heavyweights at blind tastings like this and let the blows fall where they may. Although not uncontested or undefeated champions, over the last decade Chilean wines like Vina Errazuiz' Kai and Vinedo Chadwick have definitely moved up in the rankings and must be taken seriously as contenders.