

## REVIEW & INTERVIEW WITH REX PICKETT ABOUT HIS SIDEWAYS PINOT NOIR

BY WINEDIPLOMATS | JUNE 26, 2020 | ARTICLES, WINE REVIEWS

You all love the film and novel, but how is the wine? Is it more than a novelty wine to sip while watching the film?

### Background

The fortunes of **Pinot Noir** outside of Burgundy flourished after the success of the film *Sideways* (2004), directed and adapted by Alexander Payne and based on Rex Pickett's novel of the same name.

Pickett's success inspired his sequel to *Sideways* called *Vertical*, recounting the two protagonists' adventure traveling through California to Oregon Pinot country.

It was only a matter of time Pickett would pick another famous Pinot destination as the setting of his next novel. Why did he pick Chile for *Sideways 3* and his first eponymous wine: *Sideways Rex Pickett Signature Series Pinot Noir* ?

### The Chilean Connection

Pickett's investments in Chile came to fruition through a contact he made in LA. There he met his partner in wine, Mario Velasco, who convinced Pickett to come to Chile in 2012. Pickett was quite skeptical about Chile and Chilean wine, but to his surprise, he fell in love with the country, the people and the wine.

### Rex Pickett on Sideways' Effect on Chilean Pinot

While researching for last week's article claiming that **Chilean Pinot Noir is the best value Pinot Noir** in the world, I learned there was indeed a trickle down **Sideways effect** in the Chilean wine industry too.

Pickett agreed about Chilean Pinot's value saying: "Not to damn the wines with faint praise, but the Pinots out of Chile are some of the best for the price in the world. I'm a big believer that we have to bring price expectations to each and every bottle. If I'm handed a \$100 bottle from Sonoma it'd better do something magical. At \$30 a bottle I'm expecting less, but maybe getting more."

He also concurred about the Sideways effect in Chile: "Chilean Pinots were suddenly in demand because the world needed more Pinot Noir juice! The people at **Cono Sur** told me that when the movie came out they couldn't keep their Pinot in stock. I didn't realize that Cono Sur is the biggest producer of Pinot Noir in the world. They also make terrific wines."

### Pickett's Favorite Chilean Wines & Restaurant

What other Chilean wines did Pickett adore? For Pinots, he was fond of **Casa Marin** in San Antonio, **Garces Silva's Amayna** in Leyda, and **Casas del Bosque** in Casablanca. Some are mentioned in his third novel.

It also might be shocking to know that Pickett likes other varietals besides Pinot, including **Merlot**.<sup>\*</sup> For example, he feels that Chilean **Sauvignon Blanc** should be the national grape over **Carmenere**.

Pickett added that there's a lot of diversity and untapped potential in Chilean wines such as their **Carignan** and **Pais** wines or their up and coming regions like the **Elqui Valley**.

He also supports wines from Chile's independent wine producers movement called **MOVI**, especially Derek Mossman's **Garage Wine Co.**

"I love the pioneering, buccaneering spirit of many of its winemakers. I love the topographical diversity," he remarked.

If anything, he's bored with **Cabernet Sauvignon** even though Chile makes great Cabs too. Napa Cab was the wine he was drinking in his college days – I had to ask him because we're both UCSD alumni. Sadly, my first wine experience in college was White Zinfandel.

Furthermore, much like the **Hitching Post** was central to his first novel he also had a particular restaurant in Santiago that he frequented: **Bocanariz**. It's a great place to try independent Chilean wines with great food.

#### **What gems does Pickett have in his collection?**

I was astonished to learn that Pickett doesn't have a huge collection of trophy wines. He said, "People think because of *Sideways* that I'm wealthy and consort with a rarefied group of wine aficionados – and I could – but I don't . . . I'm a man of the people. I despise elitism. If I ever make a lot of money off my wine, or the musical – because I didn't make it off the movie – I will start a literary prize for Chilean writers. That's my fantasy."

He continued, "One day I wouldn't mind tasting some high-end Burgundies, but give me a Viña Casa Marin Sauvignon Blanc or one of their cool-weather Syrahs and put me on top of the hill of their vineyard in their Casita with a view of the Andes and an Andean condor soaring past – I saw one in 2012! – that would be my equivalent of happiness."

#### **What's next for Pickett?**

Pickett's *Sideways The Musical*, directed by 3 time Tony winner Kathleen Marshall, was set to debut in 2020 until all theaters were put on hiatus by the pandemic. Perhaps another movie or TV series is in the works too.

#### **Sideways the Wine**

Pickett and his partner Mario Velasco made a deal with **Via Wines**, a small producer of about 1,000 hectares in Chile, to produce and distribute while they own the Sideways Rex Pickett brand. Via Wines also produces Oveja Negra and Chilcas.

Given Pickett's resistance to elitism, the goal was to make an affordable wine that everyone can enjoy that is still representative of the Pinot varietal. They wanted to express the Pinot fruit while keeping balance with the wood.

Pickett added: "Remember, this retails in the U.S. for \$15.99 . . . I think I've only seen one Pinot ever for less than that. And, bear in mind, too . . . in California a Pinot Noir only has to be 75% Pinot Noir to call it PN. In Burgundy, by A.O.C. law, it must be 100%. In Oregon, 85%. Ours is 100% Pinot Noir."

The grapes come from **Casablanca**, the heart of Pinot Noir in Chile. 2016 is their first vintage, but they already have plans to release the 2017 vintage and perhaps venture into other bottlings such as a Sauvignon Blanc and a Pinot Rosé.



### Technical Data

The winemakers are Carlos Gatica (formerly of Viña Santa Rita) and Pablo Barros. The grapes were grown on a property called Tapihue, which has a cool Mediterranean climate near the Pacific. The soil is deep granite along with clay and loam over slopes of varying altitudes. The grapes are hand-picked and cold-soaked before fermentation. The wine was aged for 12 months in new and used French barrels. Via Wines uses 100% sustainable practices.

Label: 2016 Sideways Rex Pickett Signature Series Pinot Noir Casablanca

Alcohol: 13.5%

pH: 3.69

Production: 9,000 cases

### Tasting Notes

Screwtop. Takes 10-15 minutes to open up. The nose shows bright red fruit, a touch of earth and minerality, citrus and some spice and vanilla from the oak. Later some floral and smoky notes emerge. The palate hits you with red cherry fruit and good acidity. However, there's a creamy silkiness to the back end and also a tinge of nuances from the oak. Overall, there are no hard edges of heat, oak or tannins; It's well balanced. It's something to drink now although the acidity will keep it for a few years.

For those who like big modern wines, this is more of a food wine for you. It's not going to knock your socks off. However, its acidity and light texture should pair with many things like chicken or salmon. At the same time, there's no barnyard or funk you might get in an Old World Burgundy.

On the other hand, if you like more classic wines, this has a nice balance of terroir and oak, which play a supporting role to the cool Pinot fruit. It's definitely Pinot and not Syrah-Pinot.

In that sense it's representative of Chilean Pinot within its price range. In Chile, you can find several examples of similar quality Pinot for a cheaper price, but outside of Chile I'm not sure you can find a better Pinot for the price other than a handful of other Chilean Pinots which unfortunately are not widely enough distributed. **90 pts AC.**

### Conclusion

If you're late to the Pinot or Chilean Pinot bandwagon, this is a good wine to hop on with because it keeps its Pinot characteristics\* while remaining accessible to newcomers. Moreover, like most Chilean Pinot, it fits stylistically between New World and Old World Pinot. This wine will go down easy on its own while watching the film or while having a casual meal with friends.

Where you can find it

You can find this wine in **several countries**: Chile, Brazil, **the US**, China, Ireland, Japan, South Korea and Mexico. In Chile, I bought mine at **CAV**. I just saw that **Bocanariz's online store** also has it.

**\*For *Sideways* Nerds**

*The irony is that even though Pinot sales boomed and Merlot sales plummeted after the film, many people were/are still drinking Merlot style Pinots that lack Pinot characteristics. This is because with the success of Pinot came more commercialization and producers growing Pinot in places that weren't ideal for growing Pinot.*

*The character Miles in the film is not actually opposed to Merlot-evidenced by the fact his star 61 Cheval Blanc is composed of Merlot and Cabernet Franc (another grape he disparages). The problem is that Merlot at the time was synonymous with cheap commercial wines manipulated to all taste the same in a fruity, often over-ripe crowd pleasing way. It was also all Miles could afford normally as a struggling teacher.*

*Therefore, Miles is more against generic commercial wines than Merlot in particular in his **anti-Merlot whining**. This may be because he's a wine snob, but it also exposes him as a hypocrite or liar, another theme of the film. In addition, he's striving for greatness in his novel-something he says **Cabernet Franc rarely achieves**-but continues to face rejection because his novel is not commercial enough.*

*Others have theorized that Merlot is what his ex-wife loved since that 61' Cheval Blanc was **supposed to have been drunk with her**. Hence, drinking Merlot might be too painful for him.*

*By the way, the Merlot quote was not left in the novel but taken from one of Pickett's early manuscripts for the film. When asked about Merlot, Pickett himself often says, "Bring me an '82 Petrus and I'll show true Merlot love." The novel actually talks about an 82' Latour (mostly Cabernet Sauvignon), but Payne could only get label rights for the Cheval Blanc.*

*Bottom line, both Pinot and Merlot can make great wines, so although *Sideways* is an ode to Pinot, it doesn't have to be a eulogy of Merlot.*