

NEWLY-RELEASED DON MELCHOR 2020  
'BEST EXPRESSION YET'



The latest release of Chile's Don Melchor is the winery's **"best expression yet"**, and **"shows the duality of Puente Alto"**, according to the winemaker, Enrique Tirado.

Talking exclusively to *The Drinks Business* last week in London, Tirado, who has been in Don Melchor's winemaking team since 1995, said that he believed the 2020 vintage is the finest that has been released from the producer since its inaugural vintage, which was 1987.

Hitting the market now with a UK retail price of around £115-120, the wine – which is a Cabernet blend from the prized Maipo Andes sub region of Puente Alto – comes from the hot, dry and unusually early vintage in this part of Chile.

While overall temperatures during the 2020 growing season (September to March) were 1.1 degrees Celsius higher than the 17.1Co average,

Tirado said that a particularly warm springtime had brought the vine's growth cycle forward, ensuring that picking was much earlier than normal.

"In a normal year we pick in April, but in 2020 we harvested most of the grapes in the second half of March," recalled Tirado, noting that the picking began three to four weeks earlier than normal for the Don Melchor estate, with the first grapes taken off the vines on 9 March, and the last on 6 April.

This benefitted Don Melchor in 2020, because it meant that the harvesting occurred before Covid-related restrictions were strictly imposed in Chile from the second week of April, and ahead of unusually hot conditions in April, when temperatures were around 3 Co higher than normal.



Tirado also told *The Drinks Business* that while 2020 was a hot year, due to the Andean influence in this high part of the Maipo Valley, night-time temperatures were colder than normal, explaining the small overall increase in the temperature recorded for the growing season.

Such conditions also accounted for the “balance and harmony” in the 2020 Don Melchor, a year that was not only warmer than usual, but drier too, with a cumulative precipitation total of just 89mm, well below the historic annual average of 335mm.

*Speaking of the latest Don Melchor release, Tirado said, “2020 shows the duality of Puente Alto, there is energy and freshness, and concentration and ripeness at the same time.”*

The weather in 2020, as well as all the work Tirado has been doing to improve the wine quality at the Don Melchor estate, have meant that the current release is among the greatest ever produced at the property, with Tirado ranking it alongside with other first-rate harvests such as 2018, ‘15 and ‘12, before declaring it superior. “I feel that the 2020 is the best expression yet,” he said.

The Don Melchor vineyard is located on the third terrace on the north bank of the River Maipo in the foothills of the Andes Mountains at an altitude of 650 metres. It covers 127 hectares, most of them planted with Cabernet Sauvignon (90%); while the remaining land is divided between Cabernet Franc (7.1%), Merlot (1.9%) and Petit Verdot (1%).

The vines in the old vineyard, which accounts for 72% of the land, are more than 35 years old on average. These parcels are planted ungrafted, and while newer parts of the estate have seen vines planted on rootstocks, Tirado told *The Drinks Business* that future plantings will be a massale selection from the oldest vines on the property and planted pié franco (ungrafted).

“We find the best connection between the wine and the soil from those vines planted without rootstocks,” he said.

Don Melchor 2020 comprises 92% Cabernet Sauvignon, 6% Cabernet Franc, 1% Merlot and 1% Petit Verdot. It was aged for 15 months in French oak barrels: 71% of them first-use and 29% second-use.