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Man of the Year

Decanter

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Eduardo Chadwick named Decanter Man of the Year 2018

It was the final ascent. The peak of Ojos del Salado, the highest active volcano in the world, was within touching distance. But then disaster struck: Eduardo Chadwick, precarious on the ladder, suddenly got cramp. 'My biggest worry,' he recounts, smiling broadly, 'was that the bottle of Seña I had with me to unveil at the summit was in my breast pocket – so if I fell, there was a very real chance it would be driven through my heart.'

The story reveals much about Chadwick. There's the driven, ambitious, relentless, single-minded, talented mountaineer in him. Also the savvy marketeer and businessman: teller of stories, creator of positive opportunities, irrepressible. Finally, there's the man: courteous, with a ready smile, a healthy sense of humour and humanity, aware of his frailties yet resolute not to let them limit or define him. 'It's a question of persistence,' he says, softly. 'I'm a survivor.'

Eduardo Chadwick is a man on a mission. His self-appointed task? To prove that Chile produces fine wines to rival the best in the world – and has the potential for more to come. Nowhere was this captured better than at what has become known as the Berlin Tasting of 2004, when Chadwick ('scared to death') pitted his top Cabernets against the global elite (Lafite, Latour, Margaux, Solaia) in a blind tasting with trade professionals chaired by Steven Spurrier, who had himself upset the established wine world order at his famous Judgement of Paris tasting in 1976, when Californian wines usurped French classics.

World class

Famously, in Berlin Chadwick's wines prevailed, rated in the two top spots. He went on to repeat the exercise 21 times, reaching 1,400 wine professionals in 17 countries, and achieving an admirable consistency of results for his wines. This was followed by a series of 10 further blind tastings, dubbed the 'Seña verticals', focusing on ageing potential by assessing past rather than current vintages. The results delivered a similarly consistent vindication of Chadwick's message, with a Seña wine ranked top on every occasion.

'We never expected these results, nor their consistency,' admits Chadwick. 'The Berlin Tasting was born of frustration that Chile wasn't getting the critical attention or ratings it deserved. It was about justice. But we gained confidence from this and saw it finally converting into critical recognition, for us



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and for Chile.'

This is a crucial point. The Berlin and Seña tastings did not just raise the profile of Chadwick's own wines (his main brand is Errazuriz but Seña, Viñedo Chadwick and Don Maximiano are his top Cabernets). They have also, by extension, provided validation for Chile as a whole. When I asked Chadwick what this Decanter award meant to him, he said: 'More than for us, this award is for Chile. It's recognition that Chile has entered the realms of fine wine. Previous recipients – Mondavi, Antinori, Torres – have helped prove their countries are part of this world-class family of wine terroirs. That's what I have been trying to do.'

Change of direction

It could have played out very differently. Chadwick initially trained as an engineer and, after university, was working in Saudi Arabia – the world of wine a distant reality. But the critical juncture in Chadwick's life came in 1983 when his father Alfonso, a talented polo player whose business interests included wine-growing, seized an opportunity to buy back what had once been the family winery, Viña Errázuriz. (The family had lost control of the estate in the mid-20th century and the country's attempts at land reform had left it effectively ruined.) On accepting his father's invitation to revive Viña Errázuriz, Chadwick set about re-establishing what had once been a proud brand begun by his ancestor Maximiano Errázuriz in 1870. 'I'd done odd jobs in my father's vineyards,' he remembers, 'so I had a little knowledge, but not much. At that time, there was no culture of fine wine in Chile; it was all very basic.' What was needed was investment and ambition – both personal and financial. Aided by the family's wider business interests in malting, brewing, soft drinks and distribution – responsibilities he continues juggling to this day – Chadwick took to the task with gusto.

As well as renewing winemaking equipment and expanding the vineyards, Chadwick took time to visit Bordeaux and Burgundy, meeting the likes of Emile Peynaud, Denis Dubourdieu and Paul Pontallier along the way. On return, he began laying the foundations necessary for fine wine at Errázuriz: re-launching Don Maximiano as 'an icon red for the modern era', planting his father's polo field in Puente Alto to become Viñedo Chadwick, and establishing Hatch Mansfield agencies in the UK.

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- Peter Richards, March 2018