

Louis-Antoine Luyt

Profile

He may be a native Burgundian, but Louis-Antoine Luyt has quickly become a seminal voice in the fight for independent, terroir driven winemaking in Chile. In a country where wine production is run almost entirely by enormous industrial wineries, L.A has managed to source fruit and rent vines from independent farmers throughout the Maule Valley. Furthermore, his insistence on dry farming, horse plowing, organic viticulture and native yeast/intervention free winemaking are welcome proof that wines outside of Europe can successfully be produced with this work philosophy.

At 22, L.A was sick of living in France. With the excuse of polishing up his Spanish, he planned a 3 month trip to South America. This quickly became a permanent vacation of sorts, and needing to find work, L.A found a gig as a dishwasher at a local restaurant. Working his way up, he eventually became the wine buyer and was introduced to Hector Vergara, who at the time was the only *Master of Wine* in South America. Hector was opening a sommelier school in Santiago, and Louis-Antoine was amongst his first students.

This gave L.A the opportunity to taste wines from all over the world, with of course a particularly strong focus accorded to Chile. Shocked at how homogenized and boring the wines tasted to him, Louis-Antoine started asking himself if this was a result of place or winemaking, and if great wine could be made in Chile at all. Through extensive research, he discovered that independently run parcels did in fact still exist, but the grapes were either being sold to huge wineries or being used by the local peasants to make wine for personal consumption.

A plan was beginning to form...

The next step was to learn how to make wine. Louis-Antoine flew back to France to study viticulture and oenology in Beaune. During his studies, he befriended Mathieu Lapierre, and a subsequent 5 consecutive harvests in Villié-Morgon led to a great friendship with the Lapierre family. It was also L.A's introduction to natural wine, a philosophy he became determined to bring back to Chile.

Now armed with a firm knowledge of viticulture and winemaking, Louis-Antoine founded *Clos Ouvert* with two partners in 2006: the project focused on sourcing organic, fair trade fruit and making spontaneous fermentation, intervention-free wines to export to France. But the disastrous 2010 earthquake resulted in a loss of 70% of their 2009 production, forcing Louis-Antoine's partners to back out of the project. Instead of giving up, L.A pushed things further: he immediately started renting 8 hectares of vines and vinifying two new lines of wines, all while continuing to make *Clos Ouvert* bottlings.

2010 was the first vintage of the *Pais* line, the only line of Chilean wines following the European model of using the same varietal to highlight different terroirs. In such, each bottling is named after a specific parcel: *Quenehuao*, *Pilen Alto* and *Trequilemu* are all "lieu-dits" with their own soil composition, expositions, elevations and micro-climates. Chile was never struck with phylloxera, and these vines are all very old and still on their original rootstock. The *Quenehuao* vines are 300 years old!

The other new line is produced with French varieties (Pinot Noir, Carignan, Cinsault), and are

adorned with colorful labels inspired by Santiago's public transit system. All the vines are tended organically and many parcels are worked by horse. Nothing is ever irrigated, a true rarity and flat out ballsy, commendable move for South American winemaking. The wine ferments off its native yeasts and only a minimal amount of sulfur is added at bottling.

The newest project is the Pipeño line. Pipeño is derogatory slang for peasant wine, usually made with the País grape. Here L-A highlights unique terroirs and farmers: each bottle sports the name of a sub-region, and is either purchased fruit he's vinified or finished wine made by the farmer. The fermentations take place in traditional, open-top lagars (vats), and are made in the light, easy drinking style typical of what the farmers produce for their everyday consumption. All of Louis-Antoine's Pipeños come in one liter bottles, and are of extraordinary value for the quality.

For a much more in depth look at Louis-Antoine's work, we recommend reading parts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#) and [8](#) of *The Chile Chronicles*, a recounting of Jules' time spent with Louis-Antoine in Spring, 2016.