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## Great Wines from Chile - Altaïr Vineyards

Two Great Wines from [Altaïr Vineyards & Winery](#) in Chile

Voluptuous is how Victor Mojica Jr., President and CEO of [Bacchus International, LLC](#), said his wife described the Altaïr 2002. Having tried the Altaïr 2002 ourselves, we would like to add sophisticated, complex, lush and intense to her voluptuous description.

Victor is a passionate man about life and about the wines he imports. He grew up in a family where wine was an important part of meals. He started importing wine three years ago, as he stated, "wine is the closest product to gold. Gold fluctuates no matter what the world is doing, and no matter what happens in the world, wine is always in the middle of everything."

Although 2002 wasn't a great year for most Chilean wines in the southern regions due to a rainy season at harvest time, Altaïr Vineyards, located in the northern region of the Cachapoal Valley, had mild and dry conditions, which allowed the grapes to slowly ripen, versus the hotter 2001 conditions. As such, the Altaïr 2002 is gorgeous, with deep rich, ripe color.

The Guia de Vinos de Chile 2005 rated Altaïr Vineyards wines 2 of the Top Ten red wines in Chile, placing the Sideral 2002 #3 with 92.32 points, and the Altaïr 2002 #10 with 90.40 points. Wine Enthusiast rated the wines even higher in their November 2005 edition, giving 92 points to the Altaïr 2002, and 89 points to the Sideral 2002. The Altaïr 2002 falls in the \$55-\$59 range, and the Sideral 2002 is in the range of \$25-\$29. After hearing Victor's descriptions and reading about the Altaïr 2002 and the Sideral 2002, we were eager to start sampling.



The Altaïr 2002, is made from a blend of 86% Cabernet Sauvignon, 7% Carmenère, and 7% Merlot, from vines that are up to 15 years old and planted on gravelly soil, and has 14% alcohol. According to the vineyard notes, they take extra care in hand-harvesting their grapes in the early morning, and then carefully sort the grapes to remove any undersized grapes, stems and less than the best grapes. After being lightly crushed, they are treated with cold maturation for four to five days followed by fermentation in wooden tanks, with pipeage, followed by 100% maloactic fermentation in barrels, and then aged in 100% French oak barrels for 15 &ndash; 18 months.

With this in mind, we sampled a small amount of the wine and it exhibited a very wet earthy nose, and was very dry with heavy tannins on the palate. We decided to decant the wine to allow it to mellow out a little before serving, while we created a special pairing dinner to enjoy with the Altaïr 2002.

After 45 minutes, the wine had opened up, and the nose was still aromatic, but now the nose had changed to be subtler with dry earthy notes, with black pepper, lush fruit with black cherry, black current and tobacco on the palate, with strong tannins and a wonderfully long-finish.

We paired this complex, balanced wine by selecting food with an earthy basis: Filet mignon with a

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Gorgonzola cheese and toasted almond crust on a pool of reduced Altaïr 2002 wine sauce, accompanied by rich creamy garlic roasted mashed potatoes, mushrooms sautéed with black truffle oil, and roasted carrots glazed with a honey syrup and tarragon. The beef with its Gorgonzola and almond crust was perfect with its rich, strong earthy flavors, as were the garlic-roasted mashed potatoes. The mushrooms with their truffle oil brought out the forest notes of the wine, and the carrots glazed with honey syrup and tarragon provided a hint of sweetness that complemented the tannins of the wine. The wine continued to mellow out as we enjoyed our dinner. This wine develops slowly and has cellaring potential to around 2019, that is if you can wait that long.

To create the Gorgonzola and almond crust, we combined 2 ounces of Gorgonzola cheese, 2 ounces of homemade seasoned dried breadcrumbs, 2 tablespoons of butter and 2 tablespoons of toasted blanched sliced almonds in a food processor and processed the mixture until it was smooth. We formed a log shape with the cheese mixture, rolled it in parchment paper and placed it in the refrigerator to chill for 4 hours.

We created the Altaïr 2002 reduction wine sauce by first seasoning and searing the filets in a pan coated with extra virgin olive oil. Once the filets were seared on both sides, we removed them and placed them on a plate and set them aside, added 1 cup of beef stock to the pan and simmered the liquid until it was reduced to ½ cup. We then added ¼ cup of wine to the reduced beef stock, and simmered the sauce until it was reduced to ¼ cup. The meat was broiled for 2 minutes on each side, 2 generous medallions from the cheese log were placed on the filets and then broiled for about 1 minute to melt the “crust”. To serve, we pooled the reduced sauce on the plates and placed the filets on top of the wine sauce, and finished the presentation with the roasted garlic mashed potatoes and roasted honey glazed carrots.



The Sideral 2002, from the Rapel Valley, is a blend made of 70% Cabernet Sauvignon, 20% Merlot and 10% Carménère, Syrah, Cabernet Franc and Petit Verdot, and has 14% alcohol. It is fermented in stainless steel tanks, with long traditional maceration, and then aged in 100% French Oak casks for 12 months.

We tried the wine at a wine tasting as well as well as at home. For the wine tasting, the bottle had been opened beforehand to allow it to breathe, but the wine had not been decanted, and the comments were that the wine was bold, but it was well received.

At home, we first sampled a small amount, and found it be very young, that it definitely needed to be decanted. We tried the wine again 30 minutes later with some creamy goat cheese and Moroccan olives, and the wine had started to mellow. It elicited a lighter but aromatic nose with light pepper notes, and deep rich fruit. After 45 minutes, we sat down to dinner, and the wine had mellowed, with elderberry notes on the palate. This wine should have a cellaring potential until 2010. We paired the Sideral 2002 with roast chicken, which we had roasted with a little of the Sideral 2002, as well as garlic, fresh sage and parsley, accompanied by a Gorgonzola potato galette, and creamed spinach. Bon appetit!

The importer for Altaïr wines is Victor Mojica, Jr. of Bacchus International LLC, [www.BACCHUSINTERNATIONALLLC.COM](http://www.BACCHUSINTERNATIONALLLC.COM), email: Victor Mojica, Jr. at

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