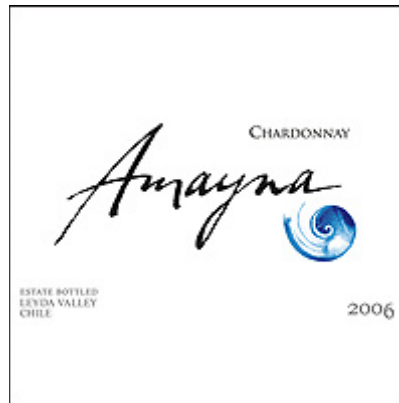




Courtesy of Viña Garcés Silva



Matias Garcés oversees production at his family's pioneering winery in Chile's cool, arid Leyda Valley.

See also:

New Wines, New Faces: Viña Garcés Silva

A family winery helps define Chile's emerging Leyda Valley with very good Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc

[James Molesworth](#)

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Who: Viña Garcés Silva is a family-owned winery located in the emerging Leyda Valley, a subvalley of Chile's San Antonio region. General manager and partner Matias Garcés, 38, oversees the project, which began in 1999 and was the first to commercially plant vines in Leyda Valley, where cool temperatures and arid conditions make viticulture virtually impossible without adequate irrigation. Today the winery has 370 acres of vineyards, of which approximately 100 are earmarked for the winery's own production; the remaining grapes are sold to [Viña Montes](#), one of Chile's top wineries.

What to drink: The winery debuted with the 2003 vintage, and there has been steady progress since then (the first few vintages were not released into the U.S. market). The wines, released under the Amayna label, include a [Viña Garcés Silva](#) Pinot Noir Leyda Valley Amayna 2006 (89, \$32, 3,700 cases made), which is spicy and alluring, with a medium-weight finish and enticing notes of crushed cherry, plum fruit, shaved vanilla and sweet earth. The Chardonnay Leyda Valley Amayna 2006 (88 points, \$24, 3,000 cases made) is stylish, with pear, piecrust and lightly toasted hazelnut notes that glide through a toast- and tropical fruit-tinged finish. There are two Sauvignon Blancs produced: The stainless-steel fermented Sauvignon Blanc Leyda Valley Amayna 2007 (88, \$21, 4,000 cases made) shows honeysuckle, lemon zest and mineral notes on a deceptively long finish, while the Sauvignon Blanc Leyda Valley Amayna Barrel Fermented 2006 (89, \$32, 1,000 cases made) shows an extracreamy texture, with notes of beeswax and orange blossom followed by lemon verbena and chalk notes on the finish. Total production for the Amayna wines stands at 13,000 cases annually. Winemaker Francisco Ponce, 28, oversees production with the help of Swiss consultant Jean-Michel Novelle.

Where: Leyda is located between the better known Casablanca and Colchagua valleys. The area, located just 8 miles from the coastline, features a very cool climate, with a morning fog and ocean-fed afternoon breeze that results in a long, slow ripening season. Consequently, Leyda is ideally suited for growing grape varieties such as Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay and Pinot Noir (if there is enough water for the vines to survive). The vineyard planted by Garcés is on a gently rolling plateau that features poor soils made of primarily decomposed granite, which result in naturally low yields. Garcés used high-density plantings when starting the vineyard, with the aim that each vine has greater competition from neighboring vines, and thus produces fewer but more concentrated grapes.

Cattle land first: "We purchased the estate in 1995, as a diversification of our agricultural businesses, to be exploited with traditional cultivation of coastal dry land: grains and cattle fattening," says Garcés. "At the same time, we saw the potential that Casablanca Valley was having for grape- and winegrowing."

Garcés also notes that well-known Chilean winemaker Pablo Morandé (former winemaker at [Concha y Toro](#)) had actually looked at Leyda for grapegrowing, but because he couldn't find enough water, he wound up choosing to develop in Casablanca instead.

No water, no Leyda: Without irrigation, there would be no vineyards in Leyda. The annual average rainfall averages just 18 inches per year, primarily concentrated during the winter months. Garcés, along with a group of partners, including Viña Leyda owner Luis Alberto Fernandez, built a pumping station at the mouth of the Maipo River several miles away, which pipes water into the valley for agricultural use. Today there are 10 wineries operating in Leyda, with a combined 3,000 acres under vine.

Where to find it: The wines are in more than a dozen states, including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Texas, Ohio and Illinois. You can also view the winery's website at www.vgs.cl.