

The North Hampshire Wine Society Blog



'A selection of Spanish wines from Adnams' Presented by Simon Plumtree 26 January 2011

Adnams is better known as a brewery but they also have an interesting wine list and about a dozen 'Cellar & Kitchen' stores throughout the UK. Based in Southwold, they were *Decanter's Independent Wine Merchant of the Year* in 2008.

Simon brought along a selection of Spanish wines, well represented in their list. (He also commented that Adnams had recently won *Brewery of the Year 2011* which seemed to us a little premature...)

Welcome aperitif

Assero Bio Brut NV, La Mancha

c. £8.99 (no longer in stock) 11%

A sparkling aperitif made from Airen, the mass-production white grape of La Mancha in central Spain. Fresh, whistle-clean and light bodied with a very pleasant crisp finish. I can do no better than to quote from wine writer Joanna Simon's website – damned with faint praise perhaps:

'This is a dry sparkling wine made from airén, Spain's most boring grape variety, in the largely undistinguished La Mancha region in central Spain - which just goes to show that if you know what you're doing you can occasionally make a silk purse out of a sow's ear...'

<http://joannasimon-wineandfood.blogspot.com/2009/04/wines-of-week-17-april-2009.html>

NB the bottle had an unusual closure mechanism – a strong wire clamp over the cork (performing the same function as the wire basket around a champagne cork) which needed to be levered off with a penknife or similar sturdy implement - not immediately obvious how you did it, and a bit unnerving!

The wines

Spain may have more vines under cultivation than any other country but it is also currently one of the most exciting wine producing areas in terms of genuine regionality and innovation. This was well reflected in the wines that Simon chose to show.

Whites

Telmo Rodriguez Gaba do Xil Godello, DO Valdeorras 2009

£8.99 13.5%

Adnams' website describes winemaker Telmo Rodriguez as a 'tireless champion of obscure Spanish grapes and reviver of ancient vineyards'. These old plots in mountainous Valdeorras had been planted with the Galician grape Godello. An attractive greenish-pale-gold colour, star-bright, fresh faintly mineral notes on a nose that developed a little in the glass. Very light bodied, lemon/apple character, just a hint of bubblegum on the mid palate. Nice balance with a dry refreshing finish. A little pricey at £8.99?

Adegas Altamiras 'Brandal' Albarino, DO Rias Baxas 2009

£10.99 12.5%

Good see a modern Albarino on the list – there's no better indication of the massive improvements in Spanish white wine making than the number of quality examples of this grape variety now appearing on the market. Another very bright pale gold colour with

greenish tints, excellent nervy nose with more prominent minerality. 'Legs' on the glass indicating greater viscosity here. Fuller, richer mid palate and satisfying length with the characteristic slightly bitter finish. Aromatic style a bit reminiscent of Viognier, but the acidity is much higher in Albarino. We generally found this a much richer more complex wine than the Godello - lees ageing will have contributed to this complexity. Regional character obvious.

Telmo Rodriguez El Transistor Verdejo, DO Rueda 2008

£17.99 12.5%

'El Transistor' so named for the radios played in the vineyard to stop the wild boar from ravaging the vines – really! We were into a different league and price range here, showing that the Verdejo grape can be very classy. Grapes are hand harvested, fermented in a mix of different sized casks and concrete tanks using wild yeasts, then the wine is matured for 9 months before bottling. Bright mid-gold, some restrained oak and a touch of development on the nose. Citrusy lime palate, acidity high as always for Verdejo but all rounded off by some subtle buttery notes from the oak fermentation. Length better here too, as you'd expect for £17.99...

Reds

Cruz de Piedra Garnacha Tinto, DO Catalayud 2009

£6.50 14%

A simple but none the less enjoyable big fruity red in the Spanish 'Joven' (young) style intended for early drinking. Given some distinction by 60-100 year old untrained Garnacha bush vines grown at altitude with sun well into the autumn, so super ripe grapes and impressive flavour concentration. This wine is from a modern local co-op making it a relative bargain at the price. Young purple rim, soft berry flavours, extra-juicy style with a nice fresh finish. Very low tannins – this is not a 'keeping' wine. Beaujolais-style but bigger! Excellent easy drinking, great value.

Telmo Rodriguez Gaba do Xil Mencia, DO Valdeorras 2008

£8.99 12.5%

A really obscure local Galician grape unearthed by Telmo Rodriguez – Mencia - showing some similarities with Cabernet Franc. A very Spanish berry nose with vanilla oak and some development on the slightly tawny rim but still a deep coloured core. Masses more structure here on the palate – my notes say 'almost a Victory V palate' by which I meant that menthol and liquorice notes are prominent, not very common in a Spanish red. Some jamminess (in a good way) and fair length with some nice bitterness on the finish - a bit like an Italian red. I liked this - good value at £8.99 for its vibrant flavours and balance.

Arribes de Vettonia Juan Garcia, DO Arribes Crianza 2006

£8.99 13.5%

More age here apparent on both nose and palate. Mellow vanilla oak and some mint/menthol notes make this reminiscent of a Bordeaux with a bit of age, or perhaps a good Valdepenas of Reserva age/quality. Arribes is a relatively new DO and this example is produced by a local co-op and aged in French and Hungarian oak. (Decanter in Nov 2010 rated this 4 stars and 17/20.) Again, at the price there was real character here, reinforcing our impression that the reds at this price level seemed to be offering a bit more than the whites.

Telmo Rodriguez Gago, DO Toro 2007

£14.99 14.5%

My notes on this include the comment 'correct'. I think the general opinion was that at £10 this would have looked a better wine than it did at £15. The grape is Tinto de Toro (aka Tempranillo) so in that sense we are back in the mainstream here. At 14.5% alcohol we are also firmly in modern Ribero del Duero style – and the ultra modern label (a huge 'g') also shows what this wine is aiming for. Fruit and alcohol all in good balance and the finish not unduly alcoholic, but we thought that at £15 we might expect a bit more to be 'going on' here.

Sticky

Telmo Rodriguez MR Mountain Malaga Moscatel 2008

12.99 (50cl) 13.5%

What a great note to finish on! A mountain wine from Malaga, this is a somewhat similar style to the French Muscat de Beaumes de Venise, but lighter both on the palate and in alcohol. Great body and balance here - sweet, honeyed and grapey (Muscat) with some orangey hints and lovely acidity taking away any hint of cloying sweetness. I thought this was worth every penny.

It's fair to say that modern Spanish wines tend not to be cheap, but it's the scarcity and true regionality in these wines for which you pay a premium. They are never going to be produced in the sort of volumes that would bring the prices down – that's not what they're about. These were all very well-made wines - however as a group we did think that some offered distinctly better value than others.

But there's always going to be an element of experimentation about such wines and that's what makes Spain such an exciting region at the moment. You're never sure exactly what's going to be in your glass, and that's the essence of wine discovery. So thanks to Simon for introducing these unusual wines and giving us a pointer towards what's going on in Spain at the moment.

The current Adnams wine list can be found at

<http://cellarandkitchen.adnams.co.uk/page/adnams-wine-list>

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