



## Spain: Catch Up on Cataluña – Priorat, Penedès, Sparkling Wines and the Other 10 Appellations

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30th Sep 2022 | [The Wine Advocate](#) | *End of September 2022*

Catalonia is among the regions that were neglected in my coverage during COVID-19. Now that we're back at full speed, I had to compensate for that neglect. It's a big part of Spain and has many wine regions, as wine is produced almost everywhere in Catalonia. The first time I wrote about it back in 2014, I gave a detailed account of each of its [10 wine appellations](#), but I didn't include Priorat and Cava in that article, because I thought were already quite well known. With such breadth of regions and producers, it's almost impossible to cover all the wines, as time is finite. But in this article, I've reviewed more wines than ever—over 500—including wines from each and every one of those 12 appellations of origin, even if it's only a handful from small places like Pla de Bages or Tarragona.

The lion's share is, again, for Priorat, sparkling wines (Ah! Most have left the Cava appellation in the meantime), Penedès and Montsant. I've carefully selected which producers to taste, going for quality more than anything, and therefore, the average score is quite high. As elsewhere in Spain, wine is quite dynamic, but it's up to the individual producers to make it happen. And some regions are more dynamic because they have more of these quality-minded producers. Don't forget, this is a business after all, and there are different ways to make money, going for quality or going for volume. There is a lot going on here, read on...



## Sparks in Penedès

Curiously enough, as I've packed all the wines together into this article, I tasted more whites than reds, a rarity in Spain. That's because I've included the sparkling wines here too, and those, mostly from the zone of Penedès, are white. Many of you may be aware of what has happened with Cava and the sparkling wines from Catalunya.

To make it short: two large players, Codorníu and Freixenet, fought for market share and made others unhappy about the quality the appellation had across the world, so those other producers started leaving the appellation. It was a small leak at first, beginning with Colet and Raventós i Blanc, but then the big bang happened in January 2019, when six family wineries from Penedès—Gramona, Llopart, Nadal, Recaredo, Sabaté i Coca and Torelló—finally left the Cava appellation.



They had created a parallel association to promote quality within the appellation, but the appellation considered it non-compatible. So, they left. The issue was that they were some of the top quality producers in the appellation, and I'd say that group probably included the top three. The appellation was wounded for good... Today, Freixenet is part of the giant sparkling wine producer Henkell from Germany, which bought a majority share in 2018 and renamed itself Henkell Freixenet. Codorníu was sold to US asset management Carlyle Group. Very few quality producers remain in the appellation, most notably Mestres.





As most of the vineyards for sparkling wine fall within the geographical limits of the Penedès appellation, it was natural that many would go under its umbrella (the appellation is quite accommodating when it comes to grapes varieties and styles), which created a special category for sparkling wines, Clàssic Penedès. Others went their own way, and the six families created Corpinnat; for now, Corpinnat is only a common brand name that they use, and they sell their wines with no appellation of origin, as a varietal wine from Spain audited by an external body to be able to mention grape and vintage.



Corpinnat has grown with new members—Júlia Bernet, Mas Candí and, more recently, Can Descregut. I spent time in Penedès and tasted their wines and visited and tasted with still wine producers and **Mestres**. To me, Mestres is the top quality producer in



Cava, and they are somehow specializing in long aging and larger format bottles (magnums and larger). They are aiming at a segment of the market that has been neglected by the appellation: they look for drinkers of high-quality Champagne rather than trying to compete with Prosecco.



*All Mestres wines age under cork.*

They produced the first sparkling wine in 1925, but the big change was in 1945, when Visol (vi = wine and sol = sun) appeared and the market moved to dry wines. They were the first to put the word Cava on the labels, and that's one of the reasons they remain in the appellation.



*All bottles are hand-disgorged.*

Nowadays, they have 20 hectares of vineyards, all organically farmed but not (yet) certified, and produce 175,000 bottles. They have moved toward more Gran Reserva wines and older wines, which is their niche. They now only do Gran Reserva wines with at least five years in bottle with the lees. Furthermore, they have kept some older vintages they considered very good and have a project to release them now. All of the wines except Coquet spend some time in barrel with the lees and no bâtonnage. They also specialize in large bottles, magnums and double magnums. To me, they are the best Cava producer today, with a great balance between acidity, oxidation and bubbles.



*The oldest vineyards from Mestres are used for their top wines, Mas Via and Clos Damiana.*

### **Recaredo Goes Green**

**Recaredo** is the leading producer of sparkling wine in Spain. It's a family-owned winery that started working organically in 2004 and then in biodynamics in 2006, for which they obtained the full Demeter certification in 2010, the first in their region. They also only use autochthonous grape varieties, harvest the grapes by hand and age their wines for a minimum of 30 months with the lees in bottle, using a natural cork for that.



*Ton Mata from Recaredo*



Their production method follows these strict principles:

- 100% grapes from their own vineyards in the Alt Penedès
- 100% organic and biodynamic viticulture
- 100% manual harvest
- 100% aging in bottle with the lees under natural cork
- 100% minimum aging of 30 months sur lie
- 100% hand turning (remuage) of the bottles
- 100% manual disgorgement without freezing the lees

Furthermore, they do not produce wines for any other winery, and they have audited yields. For example, in 2015 the average yield from their vineyards was 4,900 kilograms of grapes per hectare, when the maximum permitted yield from the Cava appellation of origin was 12,600 kilograms per hectare. In fact, all of the above points have been certified yearly by Bureau Veritas... since 2003! How about that as a quality promise?



*2008 Turó d'en Mota, one of the best sparkling wines from Spain*

But not only do they work in a sustainable way, to me it's even more important that they produce the best wines in the style in their region of Penedès. This time, winemaker Ton Mata impressed me with their current portfolio, especially with their top wine, the single-vineyard Xarel·lo 2008 Turó d'en Mota.

**Pepe Raventós** does a lot of work in his vineyards for Raventós i Blanc sparkling wines too: all of their wines are certified organic, and they also work with biodynamics (the vineyards are certified, but not the wines), adjusted to the level they see depending on the vintage, all quite dry. They celebrate their 150th anniversary in 2022 and took the opportunity to release a limited amount of library wines—a case with a bottle of 1985 and one from 1986.



*The one and only Pepe Raventós*

Some wines are offered under the personal project Mas del Serral de Pepe Raventós, produced in his basement from the grapes from the oldest vines on their property in Penedès. He also makes the Can Sumoi wines from that property, which have changed toward more freshness and precision, fermenting in smaller volumes, and they now add a little sulfur at bottling time but still within the limits of some “natural wines” associations, below 30 milligrams of sulfur.



To complete the sparkling wines, I also found time for a long-overdue visit to the family of Agustí Torelló Sibill, who left the family winery and now has a new project with his son, Agustí Torelló Roca. With this new project, called **AT Roca**, they want to make fresh, single harvest, terroir sparkling wines in the Clàssic Penedès appellation. They have 16 hectares, rent a further six and have contracts with growers for a further 24 hectares, all certified organic, all brut nature. From 2019, they used concentrated must from their own organically farmed vineyards for the second fermentation. They produce 280,000 to 320,000 bottles per year.



*Agustí Torelló Sibill, like father, like son*

They have two more projects: **Anima Mundi** from Agustí Torelló Roca that is also in Penedès (but sold without appellation) and **Companyia Vitícola Sileo**... in Montsant! The idea in Anima Mundi is to produce minimal-intervention wines with indigenous grapes—Xarel·lo and Macabeo—all from organically farmed vines and all in the village of Sant Sebastià dels Gorgs. There are two still whites, two ancestral sparkling wines and two traditional sparkling wines refermented with the fresh must of the following vintage. They keep the wine from the previous vintage for one year before they put them in bottle to referment.

When I visited them in their cellar in Penedès, they gave me a red wine to taste once we had finished with the wines from there. I didn't know about Companyia Vitícola Sileo until then. I was surprised at the elegance and the quality of the wine that Agustí senior described as a hobby and enjoyment, and I asked them for samples to taste them with more time. They started in 2016 and already produce some 45,000 bottles. They are a good addition to the quality producers in the appellation. Now back to Penedès...



### Still Penedès

Other than all the sparkling guys, I also met with many small growers of still wines, some for the first or second time, like **Joan Rubió**, Enric Bartra, Roc and Leo Gramona and Josep Queralt. Joan Rubió was technical director at Recaredo for 15 years, but in 2015, he decided to start his personal project with his family vineyard that he always worked. He started as a grape supplier to Recaredo, then joined the team and finished as technical director there, but he always continued working the vineyard, 10 hectares planted by his grandfather.



*Joan Rubió*

For now, he only vinifies his own grapes and makes mostly white wine. All of the wines are certified organic; he does biodynamics too, but he's not certified. He has no press, so it's all macerated. He uses no added sulfur, and the wines are all between 10.5% and 11% alcohol. The wines are precise, clean, balanced and fresh and are sold without appellation of origin, very gastronomic. They reminded me of the wines from Celler Credo, a project he started with Ton Mata in 2011. It's not easy to do this; you need to start with pristine fruit, operating-theatre clean winery and then a lot of care in all the processes.



*More and more people work in biodynamics. This is from Gramona.*

Enric Bartra from **Vega de Ribes** is probably the most knowledgeable person in the world when it comes to the Malvasía de Sitges grape, and Josep Queralt from **MontRubí** is considered the guru of the Sumoll red grape. While Malvasía de Sitges (and to a lesser extent Malvasía Rosada) is enjoying a revival, the local red grape from the region, Sumoll, is trickier and difficult to manage and is still a work in progress. The thing about Malvasía de Sitges is that it keeps very good acidity, and in this mild to warm climate, that is very valuable. Sumoll is a delicate grape that has a pale color, grainy tannins and thin skins and is prone to disease. It also exists in the Canary Islands under the name Vijariejo Tinto or Negro.



*Some of Gramona's vineyards are used for the Enclòs de Peralba wines.*



Cousins Roc and Leo Gramona are the sixth generation at Gramona, but while they wait for the generational change at the family winery, they created their own project called **Enclòs de Peralba** to produce still wines from Penedès. They started in 2017 and work with some of their own vineyards (five+ hectares) and purchase grapes from growers in different zones of Penedès (whose names are mentioned on the labels). All of the vineyards are certified organic and some biodynamic, but the wines carry no seal. They are sold without appellation of origin, 40,000 to 45,000 bottles per vintage. I tasted some impressive wines, especially the white Xarel.lo **Betzinera** and the red Garnacha **Els Escorpins**. Look them up in the database.



*This is the new project from Roc and Leo Gramona: Enclòs de Peralba.*

I also tasted and visited other producers I know quite well already, like Pardas, Enric Soler, Mas Candí, Toni Carbó from La Salada, Can Ràfols dels Caus and Pepe Raventós.

**Pardas** is the project of Ramón Parera Pardas and Jordi Arnan Cabezas, who work 65 hectares of vineyards in the villages of Torrelavit and Sant Pere de Riudebitlles in Penedès, which allows them to select the most appropriate grapes for each vintage to produce around 110,000 bottles. All of their wines are certified organic and fermented with indigenous yeasts. They have just joined the Corpinnat group of sparkling wine producers from Penedès. Their first vintage was 2004, and they started with Xarel.lo and Sumoll when everybody wanted Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon. The wines age very well in bottle, and they sell small quantities of old vintages. They are one of the leading producers in Penedès.



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*Improvisació from Enric Soler*

**Enric Soler** also produces some of the best white wines from Catalunya. He's in Penedès but left the appellation of origin some time ago. He works 3.4 hectares of vineyards and produces around 12,000 bottles per year. I tasted his wines from 2018, 2019 and 2020, which gave me a good idea of the character of each vintage. 2018 was rainy, and they even got snow and mildew, a year of moderate alcohol and good freshness. 2019 was more of a “normal” year with good potential for elegance and depth, and 2020 was a year with frost and mildew that resulted in low yields. Improvisació is the wine that reflects the vintage more faithfully, and Espenyalluchs and Nun are more homogeneous—they cushion the effect of the year more, especially the old vines from Vinya dels Taus.



*Toni Carbó is a payés (farmer) who works old family vineyards.*



**La Salada** is the name of the family house from Toni Carbó, a grape grower from Penedès who is also (informally) part of Mas Candí. He started his personal project in the family house in 2012 (in Mas Candí) until 2017, and in 2018 he started making some wines. He works 28 hectares, all certified organic, and they have experimented with biodynamics, but he sells a lot of wines. The current production is 30,000 bottles. The wines are quite radical and are sold without appellation of origin, so the vintages and grapes cannot be printed on the labels.



*Left to Right: Toni Carbó from La Salada and Mercè Cuscó and Ramon Jané from Mas Candí, one for all and all for one*

**Mas Candí** is the family project of Ramón Jané and Mercè Cuscó. They have 37.6 hectares of vineyards from their families and produce some wines and sell grapes to other producers. The sparkling wines are in Corpinnat, and there's also a range of still wines, a total of 60,000 bottles. Toni Carbó is a family friend, and everybody thinks he's a partner here, but he only helps as a friend.



*Mas Candí works vineyards in different places in Penedès, including some in the Garraf.*

In fact, they help each other and are always together, so that's why people think they are business partners. When I visited them, the vines were suffering from the very warm 2022 summer and the lack of rain. The plants looked stressed and sad. Unfortunately, during the harvest a few weeks later, they suffered one of the worst hailstorms I have ever seen: it killed a girl in the village of La Bisbal d'Emporda, a little further north in Catalunya.



*The Can Ràfols farmhouse*



After many years, I visited **Can Ràfols dels Caus** again. They are one of the main names of the Massis del Garraf zone of Penedès, where they have 85 hectares of vineyards inside a large estate. They have a new range of sparkling wines and two new wines from a mountain, Montombra, which they share with Mas Candí. The second generation is getting on board now. Production averages 250,000 bottles per year, produced from an impressive winery next to the beautiful farmhouse (masia) from Carlos Esteva, who defines the style of his wines as austere.



*Carlos Esteva from Can Ràfols dels Caus enjoying a laugh and a glass of wine between his general manager, Jordi Esteve (left), and his winemaker, David Mañas (right)*

Talking about the Garraf, a rocky, steep and forest zone over a huge limestone rock with influence from the sea, it's officially a subzone within the Penedès appellation (well, it's really two subzones), but the grower's association there thinks it's not enough. There are some 20 producers there, and they believe the Garraf has such a different and strong personality that it greatly differs from the rest of Penedès. Some wines have a very strong personality, like those from young grower **Jordi Raventós**. They advocate for a completely separate and new appellation altogether.





*The landscape at Garraf is very different from the rest of Penedès.*

### **Penedès Vintages, Still or Sparkling**

I had not been in Penedès for a while and needed to catch up with recent vintages, so I talked to a lot of people and tasted a lot of wines to come to the following generalizations (with their exceptions and shortcomings, of course).

After 2014 and 2015, which most describe as the last “normal” years, weather has gone berserk, moving from one extreme to the other. 2016 and 2017 were two very dry years with summer heat waves. 2018 was a wet year that gave a break to the vines and allowed the soils to load up on water resources. The wines are fresher, with lower alcohol and more acidity, but it was challenging to control mildew.





2019 was relatively normal again, warm and ripe with a generous crop; it seems like a very complete and more homogeneous vintage. 2020 was not only the year of the pandemic: it didn't stop raining during the spring, and they saw the worst attack of mildew ever. Crops were decimated, and some lost everything. The year is quite heterogeneous; the summer was very dry (and it continues almost to this day...), and the small crop got very ripe and delivered wines with lots of concentration. From the grower point of view, it's a year to be forgotten, and from the drinker's point of view, you have to select carefully. It's a year of ups and downs, in other parts of Catalunya too.

2021 was also warm and dry (some talk about 2021 being cooler when they saw the summer of 2022...), with a small crop, some 20% lower than average, but somehow the wines have concentration and acidity and come through as quite straight and vertical. For many, 2021 is one of the finest vintages for whites in recent years.



In 2022, we had one of the longest heat waves in the whole of Spain, and Catalunya was no exception. When I visited the vineyards in Penedès at the end of July, the vines were getting stressed from lack of rain and looked tired and sad. Things got even more complicated with crazy hailstorms during the harvest. It's still too early—we have to see how the wines develop—but it's clearly a very challenging year.



### **Priorat, Montsant and the Rest**

I didn't have time to visit all the regions, but I did taste a fair amount of wines. From those, the wines from **Lagravera**—within Costers del Segre but working mainly with old traditional varieties that are not allowed by the appellation—deserve a mention, as their wines have changed and improved over the last few years. They are recovering varieties that are not allowed by the appellation and are now selling most of their wines without an appellation of origin, but they believe grapes like Trobat Negre, Trobat Blanc, Picapoll de la Noguera Rosado, Hebén and others without a final name—like Pirineos 17, Pirineos 4, X8, X Avi 1997 and X Avi 2167—are worth recovering. Bernat Voraviu, the sommelier from Alkimia in Barcelona, is from the zone and is also involved in recovering these ancient varieties and vineyards and, for now, is making some experimental vinifications. Stay tuned for more in future years.

Other names worth highlighting are the wines from Josep Grau in Montsant and Penedès (a big improvement) and Josep Foraster in Conca de Barberà (some of the finest Trepapat reds out there!)





In Priorat, many are adapting and changing their labels (and sometimes their wines too) to the new structure of site-specific wines from the appellation. In some aspects, it's the most advanced in the country, but in others, like the minimum alcohol required in the wines, it is lagging behind. The requirement to have at least 13% alcohol for whites and 13.5% for reds has turned into a problem, and some of the most avant-garde producers have issues to achieve those minimums in their wines and get the approval to wear the name of the appellation. This is one rule from the past that doesn't make sense anymore, and they should be able to see it and remove it.



Monastrell is coming out of the closet. They are in the process of approving this grape that exists in some of the old vineyards and has been used without saying anything, but now many producers are pushing to get it included in the list of grapes allowed by the appellation. It's a Mediterranean grape that makes very much sense to me, that adapts well to the climate and challenging conditions of the region and can deliver freshness that contributes to make blends more streamlined and balanced.





It's worth mentioning the last few vintages in the zone, as I got a much better understanding of them by discussing with many and tasting a wide array of wines. I tasted mostly 2019s and 2020s, with a fair amount of early-released 2021s. I already reviewed most 2018s in past articles: it was a year with abundant autumn rains, a cold winter and a mild summer that slowed things down and made the grapes ripen slowly and thoroughly. Some rains in the middle of the harvest complicated things a little bit, but the weather soon improved, with warm days and cool nights that brought the grapes to perfect ripeness. The wines from 2018 should be long lived.

#### **2019, 2020 and 2021 in Priorat**

**2019** is a warm, ripe and more classical vintage, quite complete and with very good wines across the board. The grapes were healthy, and the vinification and élevage occurred mostly with no incidents. It resulted in more powerful wines with a heat wave in August that burned some grapes (15% loss), and it affected Cariñena more than Garnacha.



But then here comes 2020, a year of extremes: for some it's their worst vintage ever, and others consider it an exceptional year. It was exceptional indeed, as they had rain like never before! 2020 was the year of mildew (700 liters of rain!). Some produced very little to no wine, and some vineyards were lost completely, as people couldn't tend all the sites at the same time. We have to realize that on top of the crazy weather, we also had the crazy pandemic, and some people couldn't get the manpower to work all their vineyards and had to decide which ones were saved and which ones were getting abandoned. The 2020 mildew attack was more severe for the plants that were affected by the 2019 heat wave, and the mildew also had a more devastating result in Cariñena than Garnacha. It's the most heterogeneous vintage I have experienced in Priorat, with some bizarre and ultra concentrated wines and others that are elegant, light and floral like never before.



In **2021**, they had 70 centimeters of rain in January, the vines had water and were rested, and there was a huge crop. The summer was dry, but at the end of August, it started raining... and the grapes wouldn't ripen. Alcohol levels were down, and many asked the appellation to lower the requested limit of 13% in whites and 13.5% in reds... but they wouldn't allow it. The wines have more acidity and lower alcohol and should age nicely. Cariñena suffered more than Garnacha again.

### **On the Road (Again)**

After a short summer break, I went back to Priorat and Montsant, which were experiencing one of their earliest harvests ever. Most people were finishing by the 9th of September! I did my promised homework and visited some of the things I told you during the Covid years—the new planting from Clos i Terrasses, the Priorat vineyards from Torres and the new winery from Familia Nin-Ortiz. And I found gold there!



*Daphne Glorian, one of the pioneers from the new Priorat, with her Clos Erasmus*



I went to see the new Solanes vineyard from **Clos i Terrasses** overlooking Gratallops from within the natural park just below Montsant. As I mentioned last year, as I see in other old-vine regions like Bierzo and Gredos, the most avant-garde producers in Priorat are also planting new vineyards for the future. Daphne Glorian is also doing it. Technically, the place belongs to the village of El Lloar, and it's mostly Garnacha and some Syrah, with a magnificent view of the village of Gratallops. She bought the property in 2010 but never got around to planting it until now. She needs to increase volumes because there is a lot more demand than supply.



*The new Solanes vineyard from Clos i Terrasses*

When it comes to the wines, the 2020s were a big surprise. Yes, 2020 was a challenging year, and everybody will remember it as the year of mildew. But Glorian's explanation was that because they farm organically, they are constantly working in the vineyards, and so they reacted as soon as the mildew appeared. But they soon realized it was a different strain that gave them a lot of work, and they treated the vineyards every four days. They ended up losing maybe 10% of the crop, but not much more than what she lost from the heat wave in 2019. The wines from 2020 benefited from the spring rains in terms of freshness, and the wines are superbly balanced and have lots of finesse. The 2020 Clos Erasmus was exceptional, floral and ethereal, fresher and lighter, better balanced and elegant. A very different Clos Erasmus that made my head spin. Or, as I say, it made my heartbeat faster.



*Els Tossals in Porrera, the new Torres vineyard at 750 meters in altitude*

Another highlight from recent years has been the new Mas de la Rosa from the Torres family in Priorat. I told you about it from my armchair last time: how they keep planting more vines on their Els Tossals property in Porrera, the highest and coldest area in Priorat, between the villages of Porrera and Poboleda at 750 meters in altitude.



*A table with a view*

They had already planted one hectare in 2018, and they now have another one, all in *costers* and head pruned, a mix of Cariñena, Garnacha and a small percentage of red Picapoll. The property is slowly being recovered; it has a total of 15 hectares, often little slopes of llicorella slate soils that have to be worked manually. I went to see this



impressive vineyard with Miguel Torres Junior, and we also went to Mas de la Rosa, one of the historic properties in Porrera, from which they now produce a stellar single-vineyard bottling from 2016.



*The Mas de la Rosa vineyard in Porrera that is now in the Torres portfolio*

Mas de la Rosa is an amphitheater of old vines, 1.9 hectares of sloped and head-pruned vines (*costers*) that are 80+ years old, at close to 500 meters in altitude and only get the morning sun, so it's a place apt to produce fresh wines. This is always the last vineyard they harvest and probably one of the last in Priorat. There are also some terraces built and planted later that they don't use for the wine and should, in time, be reconverted.

I tasted the whole range from the different regions of Catalunya, where they produce wine in the restored house they have in the vineyards there. The tasting included all the vintages of Mas de la Rosa (we were there after all!), even a preview of the 2020, which showed more natural concentration but very clean and focused fruit.



*René Barbier Jr. and Sara Pérez, second generation of hippies in Priorat (and Montsant!)*

The **Pérez** and **Barbier** families are a mandatory stop in Priorat and Montsant, as all their projects together represent a huge chunk of both appellations with multiple projects. Look up the notes of Aubacs i Solans, Clos Mogador, Com Tu, Escabeces, Espectacle, La Vinya del Vuit, Mas Martinet, Sara i René Viticultors and Venus La Universal (and some more they don't want me to taste...) to see what I'm talking about. They are some of the most dynamic, advanced, aware and hardworking people in the region, and their wines are really exciting and cover many different styles and prices.

### **The Familia Nin-Ortiz Joins the 100-Point Family**

The **Familia Nin-Ortiz** works in Priorat and in the Pla de Manlleu zone of Penedès, where Nin is from (but there they sell the wines without appellation of origin), and this is how they introduce themselves: "We only work with our own vineyards and bottled by parcels, to preserve the identity of the places and soils. We do not buy grapes, in order to guarantee that all our wines are made with 100% certified organic grapes. We are part of 'La Renaissance des Appellations' as a qualitative seal of biodynamic viticulture, to obtain healthy grapes without residues, which allows us to make spontaneous fermentations without adding SO<sub>2</sub> during fermentation."





*Carles Ortiz and Ester Nin, la Familia Nin-Ortiz!*

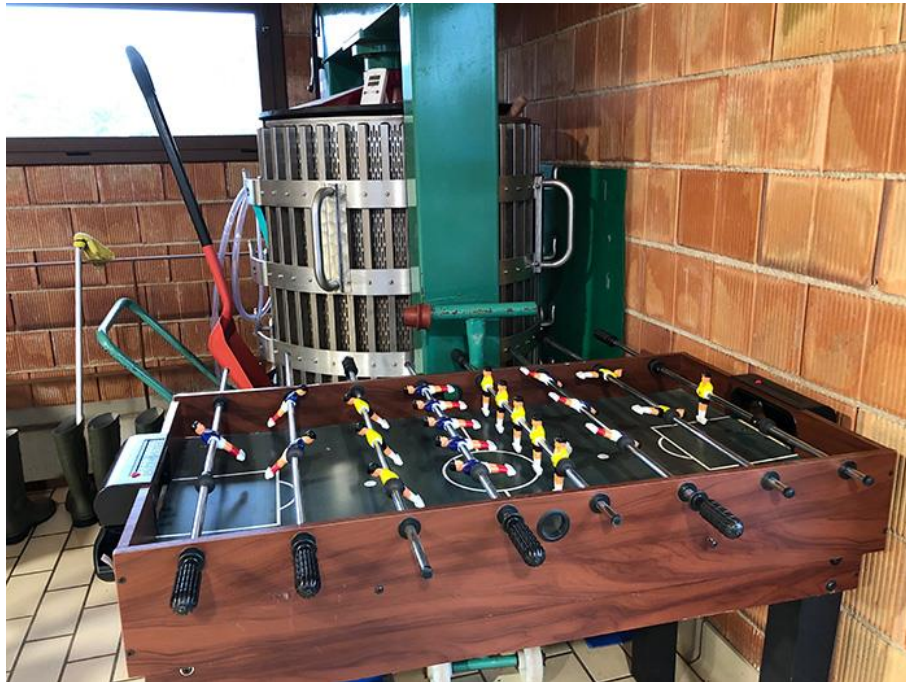
They are an example of a small project of hardworking people that has reached the top. They have been relentlessly improving their viticulture, vinification and aging and really walk the talk. They do all that is necessary to make great wines. They have great vineyards where they work very hard, they believe in what they do, they enjoy doing it, and they travel and visit other producers and drink widely, the best wines from the world. They question everything and don't give up.



*Discarding dehydrated grapes from the 2022 harvest*

They have built their winery in their Planetes vineyard in the limit between Falset and Porrera. When the whites are harvested, they keep the boxes with the bunches in a cold

storage for one or two days, then press the bunches and let the must settle, and then they fill the barrels the next day. They started experimenting with some skin contact in 2019 (one barrel) and continued with a little more in the following vintages, varying the length of the maceration—they started with five and went up to 15—and then the wines are in barrel for eight months. They use barrels of different ages and from different coopers.



*Work hard, party hard!*

The reds are produced in different ways, but all old vines are 100% full clusters; the young-vine Garnacha is destemmed, and the Cariñena is full cluster. Each parcel has its fermentation vat: the young one in stainless steel and the rest in oak. All of the wines are fermented with indigenous yeasts, and they use as little sulfur as possible. All of their vineyards are certified organic, and they don't buy any grapes; but they don't have the seals for the certifications, because it's a lot of paperwork (and money!).





They did their part, and in 2020, nature did its part too. 2020 was the year of mildew (700 liters of rain!), but they saw it coming and doubled the team of people to work in their vineyards. As a result, they “only” lost 25% of the crop; for them, working a lot in the vineyard was the key. It’s a year that they say they’ll never forget. For them, 2020 is not a warm year; the skins were perfect, and the wines were super aromatic from the day they started fermenting in the winery. They consider it an exceptional vintage, the most Burgundian vintage since they started. Many wines shone, but the 2020 Nit de Nin Mas d’en Caçador stole the show and merited the highest score possible. “Did they make magnums?” That was the only unanswered question in my mind...



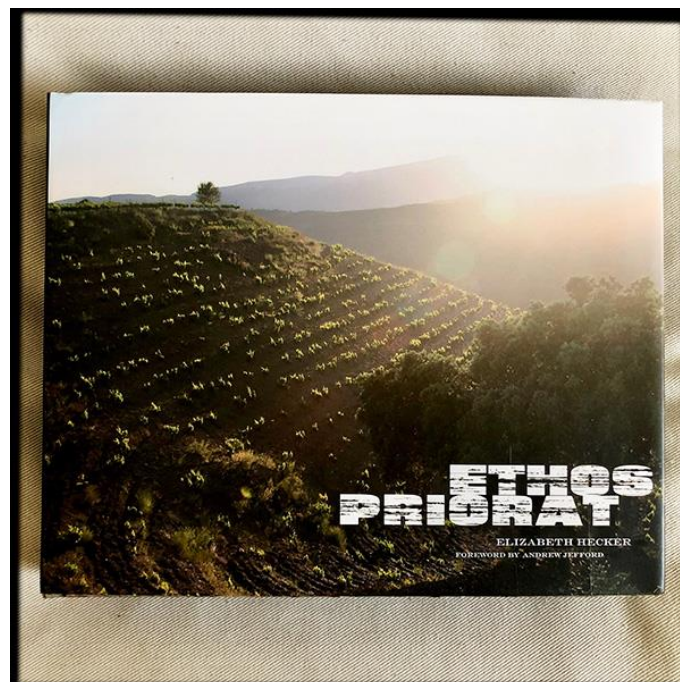
*When you see the Mas d'en Caçador vineyard, you know that one day it should produce a 100-point wine.*

I also have to mention that Ester Nin has long been the winemaker at Clos I Terrasses, whose 2020 Clos Erasmus also gets a three-digit score from me, so double congratulations to Ester for it!



**Eat, Drink, Read, Watch. Repeat.**

Now time for some leisure, travel, eat, drink, enjoy... There's a new very good and recommended resource for fans of Priorat: a very detailed book called ***Ethos Priorat*** from writer and photographer Elisabeth Hecker, who took 15 years to photograph and research the zones, the seasons, the landscapes and people from Priorat to create her beautiful book.



*The new Priorat book, Ethos Priorat, from Elisabeth Hecker*



Cataluña is a prime tourist destination—the cities, the coast and the mountains. I happened to cover the region in the middle of the summer and beginning of the (early) harvest this year. Every year, I spend some time in the Costa Brava with wine friends, so it was a good opportunity to combine work and holiday, something I often think about but rarely manage to do.



2022 saw a very early harvest!

I escaped to the Cerdanya region close to the Pyrenees for some amazing trekking in the mountains and a visit to a unique restaurant in a unique place. Close to Puigcerdà, there is a Spanish city called Llívia that is across the border from France. It's a Spanish island within French land where you can find **Ambassade de Llívia**, the restaurant from Tarragona-born chef Albert Bornat who devotes his cooking to the most traditional French cuisine and cooks dishes like *volaille en vessie* (chicken cooked in a bladder!)—which was made famous by Fernand Point at La Pyramide and later cooked by others such as Paul Bocuse—amazing *pâte en croute* and an incredible seabass Wellington!



Amazing classical French food at Embassade de Llívia—*pâte en croute*, seabass wellington and chicken in bladder

I did a stint on Spain's national TV with the Torres twin brothers, who are not related to Miguel Torres the wine producer; Torres is a very common surname across Spain. They are not only TV personalities, they are top chefs; they trained in the best restaurants in Europe and America and have their own two-Michelin star restaurant in Barcelona, Cocina Hermanos Torres.



*My first TV series!*

They wanted to include wine in their latest TV series, Menu(dos) Torres, and asked me to be the one talking about wine in it. There's a general lack of wine on TV, and I thought it was a good opportunity to show wine as part of gastronomy—which to me it is—to a broader audience. The experience was phenomenal, if short, and the reaction was also very good. I think there's a need for more wine on TV, and it's an area I'd like to continue exploring in the future.



*Javier Torres, Sergio Torres and yours truly. Who is who?*



Their restaurant **Cocina Hermanos Torres** in Barcelona, not far from the Sants train station, was a very pleasant surprise too. They designed the restaurant themselves (with the help of an architect, of course) and reconverted an old tire workhouse (unrelated to Michelin!) into a very original space where the kitchen is in the center and the tables around it. The food is also exceptional, and they are into wine; they have a team of four sommeliers (yes, four sommeliers!), and you notice the love for wine in there.



*At Cocina Hermanos Torres, the kitchen is the center of the dining room!*

The impressive logistic center and warehouse from the leading quality-wine distributor in Spain, **Vila Viniteca**, has one of the largest collections of wine in a huge place that looks like something out of Blade Runner. Imagine flying in there!!



*One of the most impressive wine warehouses I've ever seen, the one from Vila Viniteca*

During these summer months, I was able to visit some favorites like Celler de Can Roca and Villa Mas, and a couple of times in Barcelona allowed me to enjoy **Gresca**, my favorite wine-and-dine destination in the city (they have now opened a more formal branch in the Hotel Santo Mauro in Madrid). Chef Rafa Peña has opened **Bar Torpedo** with long-time friend Juan Luis “Juanlu” Pérez, and it’s the most irreverent and fun hamburger and sandwich joint in Barcelona with an incredible list of (mostly) natural wines. An afterhours spot that they opened “because it’s the place we’d like to go to after we close the restaurant and didn’t exist.”



*Fancy a hamburger and a glass of l'Anglore in Barcelona?*

In Penedès, I discovered the wine bar **L'Àngelus** in Vilafranca del Penedès, a nice addition to my list of go-to places with some simple and tasty food (mostly finger food) and an impressive wine list with all the local wines and a wide international selection of sought-after labels.





Adrià Pérez in his wine bar in Falset La Bacchanal

A similar place in Falset is **La Bacchanal** from Adrià Pérez (Sara Pérez's brother and 50% of Les Cousins and Cims de Porrera) and his partner Baco from Uruguay, which offers informal, tasty and original, high-quality, tapas-style food and a tempting wine list from someone who's worked in wine since he was 12 and also likes to eat and drink. What can go wrong there?

