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THE WORLD OF FINE WINE



ISSUE 75 2022 / A DIVIDED JASPER MORRIS ON BURGUNDY'S FUTURE
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Winemaking creation with the sincerity of artistic endeavor

Andrew Jefford



The wine's bright. A pale gold, though true gold for all that: gold you might imagine finding among shadows.

Something precious, old, hidden; warmth and wealth, carefully laid aside for later.

There's a steady stream of fine bubbles: seams of life now unwrapped, liberated, murmuring in the glass. My bottle (no.132 out of 2,047) needed air to clear a little.

That's fine: it's the wine of a farm, and you need to meet the farm first. You need to walk out of the city and on to the farm. You need to leave ducts and upholstery and cleanser behind you. And then, adjusted, naturalized, you will find the treasures of the farm laid out before you, as precisely as in the painting itself. Which painting? More of that a little later. Enjoy, first, the smells of straw, of almonds, of shelled beans, of thyme, of the hive. The wine is busy with scent, as the farm is with life.

We can see a shape forming already: round, arched, brick-thick, fat-stoned, Romanesque. This is Romanesque wine in a genre dominated, for too long, by Gothic ideals. Forget Reims Cathedral, its beaky angel and its soaring, icy interior. This sparkling wine is the cloister of Santo Domingo de Silos: a honeycomb of light, chased about by the dragons, centaurs, and mermaids imagined by lost stone-carvers.

The wine is pure in the mouth; larger and richer than you may have expected. The bubbles swarm the tongue like bees, pollen tumbling from their legs. The acidity is more like a sea swell, carrying the inner contours of flavor: all lemon, no apple. Tannin, too, sensed as much as felt: an abiding austerity inside the richness, rendering it limpid and uncloying. Earth, bitter plants, lemons; straw, dry hillside grasses, herbs; stone, dust—and the sun on all, the sun that bakes the earth of the farm brown, the sun that sets the cloisters aglow. Spotless, elemental, taut, and shocking: That is what illumination does. Yet tender, too. Like the farm.

The farm is Miró's *La Masía*: nine months' work between 1920 and 1921. "Minute realism," he said, "as far as I



could take it." It teems with life, light, and warmth—but no chaos. The scene is as intricately constructed as a watch. Like most watches and like most Romanesque churches, it is round; the painting is structured horizontally, as well as vertically. All the parts of life fit together here in a complementarity of purpose, a community of being neither happy nor sad; there is no yearning for Gothic escape.

Paths leading where they need

In September 1925 in Paris, Ernest Hemingway bought this painting for 5,000 francs as a birthday present for his first wife, Hadley. She kept it after their divorce—though Hemingway subsequently "borrowed" it, for the rest of his life. "It contained," he wrote, "all that you feel about Spain when you are there, and all that you feel when you are away



and cannot go there." It was squabbled over after his suicide and eventually left by his fourth wife and widow Mary to the National Gallery of Art in DC.

Pepe Raventós saw *La Masía* when loaned to the Tate Modern in London for *Miró—The Ladder of Escape* in 2011. He was, he says, "far from home" at the time, "relaxed, sensitive, and open to learning." The painting was an epiphany. It stirred memories of the remote Pyrenean farmhouse at Feitús that his own family had restored at weekends when he was younger, just as Miró was painting (in Paris) from his recollections of the family farm at Mont-roig del Camp near Tarragona, where he had gone to recover from typhus. Joan Miró had leaves and flowers sent to him in envelopes from Mont-roig to Paris as he struggled to finish it, surrounded by gray skies, the smell of sewers, pandemic chaos. Goats, rabbits, hens, a barking dog, a tethered donkey patiently circling a millstone, a woman bent over a washing trough: bottles, buckets, baskets. The walls of the farmhouse crack and stain like a shoreline, while stones rise from the ground in strangely encrusted perfection.

"I saw the light, I visualized this farm." The winemaker in 2011 echoed the painter in 1921. "That's where I belong, it's where I'm from. It's my origins. That's what we have in the Mediterranean. That's our climate, those are our animals [...], our plants. That is what we can offer." This wine already existed, but *La Masía* crystallized Raventós's views about what Mas del Sarral should be: "a pathway with a single destination, the origin. Maximum potential of the plot. Xarel·lo; austerity. Minerality, salinity." Since then, Pepe has been trying "to restore the farm organism" and thereby discover "how the past and the future meet." He has gathered animals about him; he's gone back to the old ways.

No less important—and perhaps this is where others lose their way—Pepe has tried to lend the act of winemaking the sincerity of artistic endeavor. This he does not claim, but it's what I see. I don't mean that 2010 Mas del Sarral is "a work of art"; no wine is a work of art. But it's Pepe's way of telling the truth about a place, his place, and that truth is something beautiful that we can take with us on our own journeys. Mas del Sarral, he says, is "a *camí*—a path. It will reach where it has to go." ■

Illustration by Dan Murrell. Painting a gift of Mary Hemingway to The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.