

Spain's local whites

From Albarin to Zalema and hundreds in between, the wealth of Spanish indigenous white grapes is a wine explorer's paradise, says Sarah Jane Evans MW



THERE'S NOT A Chardonnay or a Sauvignon Blanc in sight here. Spain makes excellent Chardonnay (Chivite's Colección 125, for instance, from Navarra) and Sauvignon Blanc (such as those from José Pariente in Rueda). What this selection shows is that the country's winemakers produce outstanding wines without

needing international viticultural imports (though I couldn't resist including Castell d'Encus's Riesling in the line-up).

There are still plenty of white varieties I've not had room for. Albillo, for instance, is coming up; Merseguera also, though it still has to prove itself. Treixadura and Loureiro are both ingredients in the wines of Galicia, as is Caiño Blanco, which gives a thrilling acidity to a wine such as Terras Gauda's O Rosal. Then in Rioja there's some Maturana Blanca, and a white version of Tempranillo too. Down in Condado de Huelva, just west of Sherry country, I tasted Zalema for the first time – a variety that makes a light subtle white. And below there's also the rare Albarin, with not one but two wines from that grape on show at this year's Wines from Spain Fair in London. Add in to this litany of grapes the fact of Spain's diversity of soils, altitudes and aspects, and the message is that Spain is ready to emerge from its reputation as a producer of reds – and big, oaky ones at that – and build a stronger image internationally for its likeable whites.

Let's start with the sparklings: Cava is much improved, as the Regional Trophy- and Gold-winners at this year's DWWA showed. It's particularly interesting to see that the top Cavas are not being made with the classic Champagne varieties, but with Xarel-lo, Macabeo (Viura) and Parellada. There are also some excellent producers who have chosen to stand outside the Cava denomination because of its reputation as a producer of cheap sparkling. Look again at

'Galicia remains a good buy. And not just Rías Baixas – Ribeiro and Valdeorras are well worth a look'

Sarah Jane Evans MW is the DWWA Regional co-Chair for Spain and was made a member of the Gran Orden de Caballeros de Vino for services to Spanish wine. These include the best of those with UK availability, tasted non-blind, at London's Wines from Spain tasting earlier this year

For full details of UK stockists, see p88



Above: Treixadura is one of the main indigenous grape varieties grown in Spain's northwest Galicia region

that *vino espumoso*. Like Raventos i Blanc's De Nit below, it might well be worth drinking.

When searching on wine lists and good independents' shelves, Galicia remains a good buy. And not just Rías Baixas. The smaller regions such as Ribeiro and Valdeorras are well worth a look, and Godello is becoming very popular as a variety. Just as red Garnacha is having a revival, so Garnacha Blanca is following on. Well-made white Garnacha produces wines that major on texture rather than fruit; they age well, and are excellent food matches. Remaining in the north, don't forget Txacoli, with its zippy freshness and light spritz.

For lovers of Rioja, there are at least some great whites. They'll never be made in great quantity, but the best are really individual wines. To the northeast, the diverse soils of Catalonia are proving an excellent source of textured, less fruity whites, made from Garnacha. Further south, despite the hot summers, there are some delightfully fresh and aromatic dry Moscatels, such as the ones featured here and also Ariyanas from Bodegas Bentomiz in Sierras de Malaga.

A new king, plus a shake-up in the approach to football following its shock early exit from the World Cup – it's a time of change for Spain. When it comes to white wines, the producers are ready and waiting.

Evans' recommendations



Raventós i Blanc, de Nit, Catalonia 2011 18.5 (95)

£16.99-£19.35 AG Wines, Berry Bros & Rudd, Bottle Apostle, The Drinkshop, Selfridges, Woodwinters
Faded pink in colour but there's nothing faded on the palate in this sparkler, which the producer prefers to keep out of the Cava DO. Ethereal notes of redcurrant and cranberry blend with brioche notes from the ageing. A DWWA Gold medal winner this year. Drink 2014-2016 Alc 12%



Colet Vins, Vatuá!, Penedès NV 16.5 (88)

£13.99-£14.99 Bottle Apostle, Roberson
Now for something completely different... A fragrant sparkling wine from a serious producer with a sense of fun. Colet blends the local Parellada with two aromatic varieties – Moscatel and Gewürztraminer – to make a dry fizz with a clean, chalky sign-off. Drink 2014-2015 Alc 12.5%



Contino, Blanco, Rioja 2011 19 (96)

£18.99-£22.30 Cambridge Wine Merchants, Exel, The Wine Reserve, The Wine Society

At last, a reason to buy white Rioja. Jesús Madrazo has been making small quantities of this for a few years and has refined the blend to his satisfaction. To the Viura he adds Garnacha and Malvasia. An easy Gold at this year's DWWA, it stood head and shoulders above the competition, complex and finely balanced. Drink 2014-2016 Alc 14%