



Tutored Wine Tasting

FORTIFICATION



« The Taste of Time »

**Speaker:
Eric LAGRE
EIC Head Sommelier**

INTRODUCTION

Fortification is the practice of elevating the alcohol content of a wine through the addition of a distillate, usually grape spirit. Under European Union regulations, the resulting fortified wine must have an alcoholic strength of no less than 15% and not more than 22%. Since most bacteria and strains of yeast are rendered impotent, unable to react with sugar and other wine constituents in solutions with a strength of around 16% and above, the fortification process will ensure the microbiological stability of most wines.

Both the stage of the fermentation process at which fortification takes place and the actual potency of the resulting fortified wine will have dramatic implications in terms of style. The way a fortified wine is matured will also have consequences in terms of its ageing potential. The wines selected for this presentation will not only illustrate those stylistic variations but try to put them into their historical context.

Tutored Fortified Wine Tasting

Tuesday 29th October 2019

Speaker: EIC Head Sommelier Eric LAGRE

Tasting notes by WSET Diploma Graduates Eric LAGRE & Magda KOTLARCZYK



TASTING LIST

(1) 2009 « Turriculæ » Mas Gallo-Romain des Tourelles (Est. 1975)

Baucaire in the Gare on the Via Domitia between Provence and Languedoc, Gaule

(2) 2015 Manzanilla de Añada « Pago de Macharnudo » Viña Callejuela (Est. 1998)

Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain

(3) 25-Year-Old Solera « Gran Barquero Amontillado » Bodegas Pérez Barquero (Est. 1905)

Montilla-Moriles, Córdoba, Andalusia, Spain

(4) 1989 « Sercial » Vinhos Pereira d'Olivera (Est. 1820)

Madeira, Portugal

(5) 5-Year-Old « Fine Rich Reserve » Justino's Madeira (Est.1970)

Madeira, Portugal

(6) NV « Carthagène Rouge » Château Mire l'Etang (Est. 1972)

La Clape, Aude, Languedoc, France

(7) 2003 « Vintage Port » Quinta do Noval (Est.1715)

Pinhão Valley, Douro, Portugal

(8) NV Solera Est. 1957 « Tintilla de Rota Noble, Vino de Licor » Bodegas El Gato (Est.1957)

Rota, Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain

(9) NV 15-20 Years Old « Grand Rutherglen Topaque » Stanton & Killeen (Est.1875)

Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia

(1) VINUM GRAECUM; AN EARLY FORM OF FORTIFIED WINE

2009 « Turriculae » Mas Gallo-Romain des Tourelles (Est. 1975)

Baucaire in the Gare on the Via Domitia between Provence and Languedoc, Gaule

Making wine in Roman times was a risky business. In those days, wine was indeed so prone to faults that one struggled to keep it in drinking condition for more than three months to a year. This is why some researchers claim that the history of the wine trade around the Mediterranean in the Ancient World can be summed up by a history of sweet wines, for the latter were the only wines resilient-enough to travel and age, which is not completely true. The first connoisseurs systematically to appreciate wines which had been allowed to age were the Romans, and the Romans did produce fine wines destined for export which were dry. The Falernian and Surrentine wines of Campania notably required 15 to 20 years of ageing before they were considered at their best and were often kept for decades longer. Interestingly, the Greek physician Galen noted around 130AD that, even though there was nothing as wholesome as those slowly matured wines, "aged" wine needed not necessarily be old, but could simply have the characteristics of age. In other words, it was possible, indeed very common, to fake age in wine. There were three ways to pass young wine off as an old wine: one could blend it with older wines, age it prematurely by means of heating it, or simply flavour it to recreate the signature profile of an old wine. Turriculae is one such "adulterated" wine of the third category. It is in a style known as Vinum Graecum, an imitation of the Greek wines or Vinum Transmarinum that were all the rage at the period of the Roman Republic and Roman Empire. The present recipe by Columella dates back to 70AD, but the earliest one was recorded by Cato the Elder in 150BC. Cato's recipe followed the way wine was made on the Greek island of Cos, starting with an addition of brine and finishing with a couple of years of maturation under the sun. Not only was Cato an agronomist but a very conservative politician opposed to the Greek values centred on a love of luxury and excess. He saw the ostentatious consumption of the sweet dried-grape wines of Greece, notably the prized wines of Chios and Lesbos, as an immoral indulgence. One must bear in mind that the Coan wine from which Cato took inspiration was never counted as one of the fine wines of Greece. Its only virtue was to be produced using stabilising techniques which made it viable as the first ever brand of commercial wine in history (the day Chian and Lesbian wines started to be brined actually marked their decline). Most recipes for Vinum Graecum were built around two basic ingredients: grape juice inspissated by boiling into a syrup called defructum and seawater. Defructum was necessary to elevate sugar levels in the fermenting must and therefore alcohol levels in the resulting wine; a practice that can be seen as an early form of fortification. As for seawater, it helped prevent the bacterial infection that caused so much wine to prematurely turn into vinegar. In the first half of the 5th century AD, Palladius was still at it, explaining how to fake age in wine by adding a powdered mixture of pine resin, roasted bitter almonds and fenugreek to the basic recipe for Vinum Graecum. In Antiquity, wine was matured in pitch-lined amphora hence it was bound to taste of resin. With old age, it would turn green-tinged amber in colour and a compound pungent with a rancio scent of walnut and fenugreek called Sotolon would develop. Columella makes no mystery that the use of fenugreek in his recipe aims at nothing other than faking age in young wine to maximise profits.

Wine description: Turriculæ *Latin for « Turrets » in reference to the name of the reconstructed Roman wine estate*
Vintage: 2009 *2762 years after Rome was founded in 753 BC*
Producer: Mas des Tourelles (Est. 1975) www.tourelles.com
Winemaker: Oenological Archaeologist Hervé Durand
Indication of origin: Beaucaire in the Gare on the Via Domitia between Provence and Languedoc, Gaule
Style: Faking of age in young wine using Columella's recipe for Vinum Graecum
« Boisson aromatisée à base de vin, plantes et sel »



Inspired by the discovery in the grounds of Mas des Tourelles of the remains of a workshop from the Roman era where Gallic amphorae with a capacity of 28 litres were manufactured for the wine trade, a team of oenologists, archaeologists and historians decided in the early 1990s to build the first ever reconstitution of a Gallo-Roman winery complex in the world (see photo montage of the Cella Vinaria in action). Turriculæ is made in a style called Vinum Graecum. The adulterated wine aimed at replicating the prized Vinum Transmarinum for which the Roman elite was ready to spend a great deal of money. The core recipe for Vinum Graecum included seawater and defructum (grape juice inspissated by boiling into a syrup with concentrated levels of sugars and acids). Both ingredients were added to the must prior to fermentation. While defructum was used to "chaptalise" and acidify the wine, the brine helped prevent it from turning into vinegar. In other words, higher alcohol, boosted acidity and salt were used as wine stabilising agents. When Turriculæ was made for the first time, a film of yeast formed on the surface of the wine within the half-buried dolia (earthenware fermenter with a capacity of 400 litres). By subsequently filling the dolia up to the brim before sealing it for two months until the wine was ready for bottling, that flowering of the yeast was prevented. In other words, Turriculæ is not biologically aged "sous voile". Still, the wine exhibits the aldehyde-like rancio scent of a Vin Jaune of the Jura, Fino from Montilla-Moriles or Manzanilla from Columella's birthplace in Sanlúcar de Barrameda. By flavouring the wine with iris root and fenugreek during fermentation, Columella manages to replicate the profile of old wine matured in oxidative conditions.

Assemblage: Clairette & Grenache Blanc
Alcohol: 13%abv
Residual sugar: 5.00 g/l
Total acidity: 3.36 g/l
PH: 3.75
Closure: Natural Cork
Capacity: 75cl
Supplier: Wine only available from Mas des Tourelles' cellar door shop for €12.80 per bottle
UK retail price: Was the wine to be distributed in the UK, it would sell for around £16.00 per bottle

Appearance:

This white wine looks clear and bright. It is deep gold in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean. It exhibits a medium-plus intensity of developing aromas (it could be argued that the wine has now reached full development, for it hasn't got much more to give, has it?). The nose is dominated by curry spice (notably fenugreek not unsurprisingly) and nuts like walnut, roasted almond and peach kernel. The celery salt smell is almost like that of the seashore. However, that brininess is underpinned by peach and apricot fruit, the ripeness of which is lifted by a perfume of acacia and honeysuckle.

Palate:

This medium-bodied wine is dry. Acidity, alcohol and intensity of flavours are all medium. The stone fruit identified on the nose doesn't materialise on the palate. There isn't any sort of fresh fruit flavours left here to identify for that matter. Only the salty tang of brine and the citric zing of orange, lime and lemon peel maintain a sense of freshness. The savoury taste of soy sauce together with the spiciness of fenugreek and the nuttiness of walnut and roasted almond creates a rancio-like character that contributes a degree of austerity to the finish of medium length.

Assessment of quality:

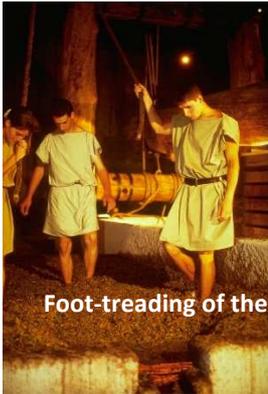
The wine is surprisingly interesting, if not very good. The complexity of its aromatic profile makes up for its slight flabbiness. The lack of fruit on the palate indicates that this bottling might be reaching the end of its shelf life, though that austerity will probably not put people off, at least not those who have a thing for biologically-aged wine. Here, the combination of saltiness, nuttiness and citric tang manages to convincingly reproduce the profile of Vin Jaune or Fino Sherry. The latter are not particularly known for their fruitiness, are they? That profile perfectly matches many of the dietary favourites of the Romans, namely oysters and smoked fish. Fatty fish is indeed a good pairing, so is hard-paste cheese like Cantal, truffle dishes or chicken and mushroom.



Vines trained up olive trees and pergolas



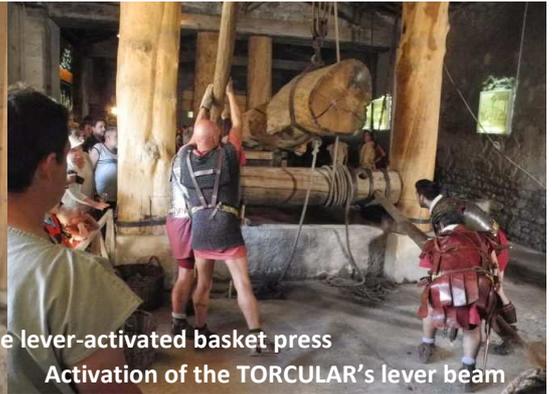
CALCATORIUM filled with one day's worth of harvest



Foot-treading of the grapes



Shovelling of the leftover skins and stalks into the lever-activated basket press



Activation of the TORCULAR's lever beam



TORCULAR

CALCATORIUM

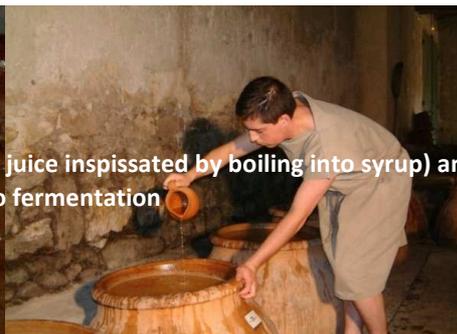


Free-run and pressed juices collected in LACUS

Grape juices decanted into DOLIA for fermentation



Cocktail of defructum (grape juice inspissated by boiling into syrup) and seawater, plus fenugreek and iris root Added to grape must prior to fermentation

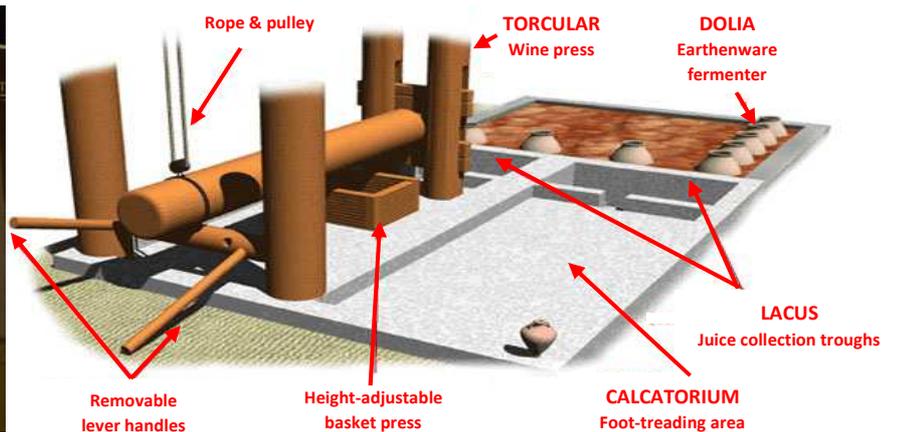


Flavoured grape must fermenting in DOLIA (half-buried 400l earthenware fermenters)



VINUM GRAECUM following Columella's recipe (bottled rather than kept in 28l Gallic amphorae)

TURRICULAE 2009 - 75cl - 12,80€
TURRICULAE 2009 - 37,5cl - 8,80€



BIOLOGICAL AGEING



Venenciadores & their tools



Copitas

Venencia
&
Catavino de Fino
(Jerez-Xérès-Sherry)



Caña
&
Caña de Manzanilla
(Sanlúcar de Barrameda)

Fino de Jerez, Puerto Fino and Manzanilla is how biologically aged Sherry is called depending on whether it is in the town of Jerez de la Frontera, El Puerto de Santa María or Sanlúcar de Barrameda that it respectively spends a minimum of three years purifying under an active layer of yeast called velo de flor. Regardless of where the wine is grown within the Sherry winegrowing region called Marco de Jerez, ageing it within one of the three above-mentioned towns which form the so-called Sherry Triangle is what is going to give it its name. It all starts with base wine, the end-product of the fermentation to dryness of the juice of Palomino grapes preferably grown on Albariza soil in the Jerez Superior. Being porous and high in chalk, this soil type drains well in winter when it rains and retains water in summer when conditions are very hot and dry. Not only does Albariza help yield healthy grapes but it boosts acidity levels in a cultivar that lacks acidity. The base wine has a typical alcoholic strength of 11 to 12.5%. Its relatively neutral aromatic profile is the fruit of gentle pressing and fermentation at 28°C, unwanted primary aromas and ubiquitous light esters like pineapple and pear drops being eliminated at such a high temperature. The herbaceous wine tastes of apple and, despite its low acidity, it is alive with lemon zing and some carbonic content.

Base wine fortified to 15%abv becomes mosto. A 15% level of alcohol guarantees bacteriological stability without inhibiting the flor growth that is going to trigger the biological ageing process. Mosto is stored in traditional 600-litre casks of seasoned American oak called Botas or Butts. Since flor requires oxygen to grow, that butt will only be filled up to 4/5 of its capacity to create an air pocket (this is why a butt always equals 500 litres of wine in industry data). Under these new conditions, the common yeast turns from fermentative to oxidative and film-forming. As it develops on the surface of the wine, the active layer of yeast breathes oxygen, not only the one present in the air pocket but the one dissolved in the wine, protecting it from oxidation. In the same breath, ethanol is oxidised into acetaldehyde, the compound that gives Sherry this signature smell underpinned by milky notes of blanched almond and fruit kernel. The primary character of the mosto gradually develops, the juiciness of the citrus fruit notably turning into the bitter oils one finds in the rind. As the yeast cells complete their cycle and die, they fall to the bottom of the cask and form a lees that contributes bakery notes through autolysis, as in Champagne, though the resulting yeastiness is more like bread dough than it is like biscuit or brioche. The base wine having undergone malolactic fermentation in wood, diacetyl compounds provide some butteriness. Yeast activity goes hand in hand with the gradual depletion of acetic acids, sugars and glycerol hence a wine that will grow ever more delicate, dry and light-textured under flor. Despite the collapsing acidity, some sense of freshness is maintained by a degree of salinity. Whereas wine turns ever more brown in colour and dull in aromas and flavours through oxidation with extended physico-chemical ageing in cask or maturation in bottle, biologically-aged wine appears to become fresher-looking the longer it ages under flor. Paradoxically, after 7 years of biological ageing, at which stage a lack in nutrients can no longer sustain flor growth and the veil starts breaking down, Fino Sherry and Manzanilla are at their purest, most delicate and pungent, yet they qualify as fully developed. Mosto becomes sobretabla after one year in butt. It can then enter the dynamic solera & Criaderas ageing system, through which the añada will become blended to ever older wines until bottling.



Not only is Manzanilla aged in more optimal conditions than Fino (hence a level of finesse that owes it an appellation of its own) but it comes with different sets of traditions. Since it is so delicate compared to Fino, Manzanilla has either been counted as proper Sherry or simply dismissed as inferior depending on fashion. A taste for lighter wines means that it is now celebrated as the ultimate style of Sherry in Spain. However, Manzanilla is ignored in countries like the UK where people prefer fuller-bodied wines. In the Sherry triangle, the cellar master is known as Venenciador. The latter checks the condition of the wine in cask using a tool specifically designed to take samples without disturbing the delicate velo de flor. In Jerez, that tool formed of a stainless-steel cup attached to a fibreglass handle is called a Venencia, whereas in Sanlúcar, it is entirely made of bamboo and called a Caña. Caña is also the name given to the traditional drinking vessel used in Sanlúcar to enjoy Manzanilla. In contrast, people drink Fino from a catavino in the tapas bars of Jerez. Since connoisseurs like to nose their wine, they opt for a larger tulip-shaped glass rather than those copitas. Try not to hold the body of the glass. Instead, grab its stem or base to keep the wine ice-cold and refreshing while you drink it. As soon as it is bottled, biologically-aged wine can become susceptible to oxidation. Manzanilla and Fino therefore need to be drunk as fresh from the cask as possible, within 6 months to a year from bottling, and on the very day the cork is pulled.

Sanlúcar de Barrameda benefits from a cooler and more humid maritime air. There, good ventilation, constant humidity and moderate temperatures guarantee flor growth all year long. These privileged ageing conditions plus lower levels of ripeness at harvest mean that Manzanilla will display more acidity and greater delicacy of flavours and colour than Fino. Manzanilla proves also somewhat saltier. Contrary to popular belief, this has nothing to do with a closer proximity to the ocean but with that consistency of yeast activity. Its added finesse owes Manzanilla an appellation of its own: DO Manzanilla de Sanlúcar. DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry applies to very other style of Sherry.

In Spain, Manzanilla and Fino used to be sold at an alcoholic strength of 15.5%. But under EU regulations, since wine traded within the European market is taxed at a cheaper excise duty rate when its alcoholic strength is at 15% or below, biologically-aged Sherry is now marketed at no more than 15%. This is one amongst many tricks of the trade.

(2) OXIDATIVE AGEING N°1: BIOLOGICAL

2015 Manzanilla de Añada « Pago de Macharnudo » Viña Callejuela (Est. 1998)

Sanlúcar de Barrameda, Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain

If all the age-worthy wines of Antiquity had one thing in common, it was a high alcohol content. Falernian wine, the most famous wine of Roman Italy, was so potent that Pliny the Elder would come to describe it as the only wine able to catch fire. Seldom will a wine be able to ferment beyond 15% of alcohol and Falernian wine probably didn't reach a much higher level. That threshold was enough to guarantee its bacteriological stability anyway, rendering it less prone to spoilage and therefore capable of its legendary longevity. All the mature wines of Antiquity also shared a characteristic amber colour, which was a sign of deliberate oxidation. Interestingly, Turricalae is reminiscent of Vin Jaune, the French for Yellow Wine. Both colours actually indicate distinct types of oxidative ageing. A browning of the colour derives from extended physico-chemical ageing, during which process oxygen directly impacts a wine's profile, notably turning Lactons into sotolon, the walnut and fenugreek scent of which is called rancio. Since rancio is the signature smell of Madeira, deliberate oxidation through physico-chemical ageing is better known as Maderisation. On the other hand, the yellowing of a wine's colour points at biological ageing. The process starts when oxygen forces the ferment to flower over the surface of the wine. Paradoxically, that active layer of yeast protects the wine from oxidation through breathing, turning ethanol into ethanal or acetaldehyde in the same breath. Aldehydes have an almond-like scent which is the signature smell of Sherry. Provided that a large-enough surface of the wine comes into contact with oxygen, flor is bound to grow. It is hard to gauge whether Columella saw the growth of that so-called "velo de flor" as a fault. However, it is an amazing coincidence that Sanlúcar de Barrameda in Cádiz was both his birthplace and that of the first commercial style of biologically aged wine: Vino Blanco. This primitive form of Manzanilla was introduced in the mid-18th century AD. It was made out of one single crop of Palomino grapes fermented to dryness in a butt of seasoned American oak then statically aged under flor in that same cask for a year or two maximum. Equipo Navazos in partnership with Dirk Niepoort revived this unfortified style of "Sherry" back in 2008. Manzanilla and Fino Sherry were not made as we know them today before the 1820s, and it is overproduction in the 1970s that led to the total standardisation of their winemaking process. Wines of different origins within the Marco de Jerez started to be blended together, and since vintages were already being blended through dynamic ageing in solera by that time, absolute product consistency was achieved. Co-founder of Manifiesto 119 Ramiro Ibáñez Espinar now spearheads a return to terroir expression in Manzanilla. It is he who helped La Callejuela to statically age the present vintage-dated, single-vineyard example. Sherry is less and less popular hence producers no longer have to grow it on lesser terroirs of sand or clay but strictly on Albariza. One knows that Palomino grapes grown on such a chalky soil yield better quality wines but they are not aware that Albariza comes in different forms, each soil variation impacting the resulting wine differently. If the vineyard of Sanlúcar is four times as small as that of Jerez, Sanlúcar is four times as diverse as Jerez in terms of soil structures. Funny enough, Pago de Macharnudo forms part of the Jerez vineyard area but, since the wine is aged in Sanlúcar, it qualifies as DO Manzanilla, not DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry.

Wine description: Manzanilla “Macharnudo” de Añada
Vintage dated: 2015 *bottled in May 2019*
Producer: Viña Callejuela (Est.1998) www.callejuela.es
Winemaker: Brothers Pepe and Paco Blanco with consultancy of Ramiro Ibáñez Espinar
Indication of origin: Grown in the vineyard of Viña de la Choza, Pago Macharnudo, Jerez, Cádiz
Biologically aged in Sanlúcar de Barrameda hence the DO Manzanilla, not Sherry
Style: Vintage-dated, single-vineyard fortified wine aged statically under velo de flor

This is part of a trio of terroir-driven Manzanillas. The soil type and microclimate of the single vineyard where it is grown, as well as the vintage character of the year when it is grown should indeed translate into the resulting wine. The first Manzanilla in the series originates from the 16ha vineyard of “La Callejuela” in Pago Hornillo just outside Sanlúcar de Barrameda. There, Palomino is grown on a cement-like type of Albariza called Tosca Cerrada. Since Tosca Cerrada represents 80% of the Albariza soils in the Marco de Jerez, consumers tend to find the fresh and round style of wine it yields the most approachable and easy to understand. The second Manzanilla in the series is made from Palomino grown in the 8.5ha vineyard of “Las Mercedes” in Pago Añina between Sanlúcar de Barrameda and Jerez on a loose, crumbly and porous type of Albariza called Antejuela. Antejuela is so rich in calcium carbonate that growers consider it the purest form of Albariza. The wine it yields is of incredible finesse. Since it combines both weight and freshness of acidity, such wine is generally destined to be made into the Palo Cortado style of Sherry. The present and third terroir-driven Manzanilla in the series produced by Viña Callejuela is made from Palomino grapes grown in the 4.5ha vineyard of Viña de la Choza in Pago Macharnudo just outside the town of Jerez. This is one of the most extreme terroirs within the Marco de Jerez. Inland, temperatures are indeed 10°C above those recorded in the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Moreover, the vines are planted on a type of Albariza soil called Barajuela which has a tough structure to crack. Having to work harder to grow its root system through this marine-fossil-rich sort of chalk laminated with ochre, the vine ends up yielding an earthy style of wine that displays an outstanding degree of power and concentration. Such wine will often be destined to be made into the Amontillado style of Sherry. In all three instances, the grape juice undergoes spontaneous fermentation with indigenous yeasts. The resulting dry white wine is then fortified to 15% of alcohol before being biologically aged in traditional Sherry butt. Considering that one year in a single 600l cask of seasoned American oak equals 3 years in a solera & Criaderas system, this wine bottled with low levels of sulphites after 3 to 4 years of static ageing should display the same pungency of aldehyde character as the dynamically-aged Amontillado by Bodegas Pérez Barquero.



Assemblage: 100% Palomino
Alcohol: 16.5%abv *this concentrated level of alcohol was achieved through water evaporation during the static ageing process*
Residual sugar: 1.20 g/l
Total Acidity: 4.24 g/l
PH: 3.18
Closure: Natural Cork
Capacity: 50cl
Supplier: Iberian Drinks UK Ltd www.iberiandrinks.co.uk
UK retail price: £46.00 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19

Appearance:

This white wine looks clear and bright. It is mid-gold in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean (though my opinion is that aldehydes are pungent with a smell somewhat akin to white glue). The aromas of medium-plus intensity are fully developed. The dominant scent combines yeasty bread dough, bitter lemon rind and milky blanched almond. There is also an underlying fruit character which is very reminiscent of rustic apple cider.

Palate:

This medium-bodied wine tastes bone dry. It is fortified to a medium level of alcohol and the acidity is medium too. Some salinity creates a sense of freshness. The quality of nuttiness seems more layered and toasted on the palate than on the nose. The complex mix of hazelnut, walnut and salted almond is complimented by notes of fenugreek and toasted brioche. No apple cider here, only the bitter twist of lemon rind in the finish of medium-plus length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is very good. Of the trio of Manzanillas we compared and contrasted in preparation for this presentation, this is the more precise and better integrated and balanced example. Even the colour looks brighter. If the wines are different in terms of weight and complexity, their core profile displays the same milky blanched almond, yeasty bread dough and bitter lemon rind character derived from the biological ageing process itself. **Flor is the word, not terroir!** There is no sense of time and place here. Serve this wine chilled as an aperitif or pair it with fish, seafood, cold cuts or cured cheese.

(3) OXIDATIVE AGEING N°2: PHYSICO-CHEMICAL

25-Year-Old Solera « Gran Barquero Amontillado » Pérez Barquero (Est. 1905)

Montilla-Moriles, Córdoba, Andalusia, Spain

If Manzanilla was statically aged then bottled as a vintage wine well into the 20th century, it was nonetheless in Sanlúcar de Barrameda that vintages started to be blended from around 1760. At first, it was a matter of mixing the nutrient-rich new production together with the previous harvest to feed flor growth during the biological ageing process that had just started to be developed a decade or so earlier. It wasn't until the mid-19th century that the Solera & Criaderas system would be used as the current practice of dynamically ageing wine in gradual, evolving stages with regular, systematic refreshments. Note that brown Sherry deliberately oxidised from the start, namely the Oloroso style, will be subjected to this fractional blending system only later in the 19th century. In the case of Olorosos, it was evidently not a question of sustaining flor growth as with Manzanilla or Fino but of ageing wine at a much quicker pace; time was money in an age of high demand in other words. Amontillado is technically speaking a hybrid style between biologically aged Manzanilla on the one hand and physico-chemically aged Oloroso on the other hand. "Amontillado" virtually translates as "in the style of Montilla". Montilla-Moriles in Córdoba is indeed the winegrowing region where the style first appeared. As we saw earlier, biological ageing is a form of oxidative ageing in its own right, even if the veil of flor effectively prevents oxidation as it breathes the oxygen dissolved into the wine. However, in order to have that protective quality, the yeast layer needs to be active. Yeast activity requires good ventilation, constant humidity and moderate temperatures. These conditions are guaranteed all year round in the ocean-influenced Mediterranean climate of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. In contrast, the continental climate of Montilla-Moriles causes the layer of yeast to break down in the heat of summer and the cold of winter. The wine suffers a degree of oxidation as a result, which gives it weight and depth of colour. In that respect, the Solera & Criaderas system as a means of sustaining flor growth is probably more necessary inland in Montilla-Moriles, or even in Jerez, than it is in the coastal town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda where conditions are optimal. Eventually, the making process of Amontillado was formalised into two phases of ageing: first a biological one for finesse then a physico-chemical one for weight. The transition from one phase to the next is fully controlled by the winemaker. One only has to render the layer of yeast inactive by elevating the alcohol content of the wine from 15% to 17% through an addition of raw grape spirit. At around 15% of alcohol, wine is bacteriologically stable, yet flor can grow, but biological activity is no longer possible beyond 17%. Palomino will never achieve the legal minimum level of alcohol of 15% through fermentation alone in the Mediterranean climate of Cádiz hence Manzanilla and Fino Sherry cannot but be fortified wines. On the other hand, Fino isn't fortified in Montilla-Moriles. Pedro Ximénez does indeed grow so sugar-rich in the arid climate of the Cordoban hills that by the time it is fermented to dryness it will have reached that crucial 15% level. Producers actually boast that their Fino won't give you a hangover because it is "Natural Fino", not fortified wine as in Cádiz. The claim reminds me so much of those Edwardian advertising campaigns promoting the health benefits of cigarette smoke that I cannot help but smile. Incidentally, I take it as a reminder that biologically aged wine is as food-friendly as most table wines.

Wine description: Gran Barquero, Amontillado
Age-dated: 25 Year Old Solera *bottled in the spring of 2019*
Producer: Bodegas Pérez Barquero (Est. 1905) www.perezbarquero.com
Cellar Master: Juan Marquez
Indication of origin: DO Montilla-Moriles, Córdoba, Andalusia, Spain
Style: Dry fortified wine aged biologically then physico-chemically in a solera system

The Pedro Ximénez grapes are grown on albariza soil in the sun-drenched Sierra de Montilla and Moriles Altos. There, the company owns 100ha of vineyards but they also source grapes from associated growers across an extra 400ha of vineyards. The white grapes are hand-harvested in September then transported from the best pagos to the "Lagar de la Cañada" winery in small crates to avoid oxidation and premature fermentation. It is the free-run juice from the pneumatic press or "mosto de yema" that is going to be used for the making of the more delicate Finos. The Pedro Ximénez grape matures to such a high level of sweetness that its juice will naturally ferment to the legal minimum level of alcohol of 15%. The wine is fermented in traditional concrete tinajas with a capacity of up to 10,000 litres, a tinaja being the Iberian equivalent of the Roman dolia. The wine is racked off its lees and decanted back into a tinaja for storage until one decides what style is going to be produced out of it. This Amontillado is dynamically aged in traditional 600l butts of seasoned American oak in the cathedral-like bodega owned by the company in Montilla. First, the wine is biologically aged as a Fino for the first ten years. It is then fortified to 17%abv through an addition of raw grape spirit before undergoing a phase of physico-chemical ageing for another 15 years.

Assemblage: 100% Pedro Ximénez
Alcohol: 19%abv
Residual sugar: <5.0 g/l
Total Acidity: 6.50 g/l
PH: 3.15
Stopper: T-top cork
Capacity: 75cl
Supplier: Vinissimus www.vinissimus.co.uk
UK retail price: £28.75 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19



Appearance:

This white wine looks clear and bright. It is pale amber in colour with red copper highlights. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean. It exhibits a medium-plus intensity of deliberately oxidised aromas. The profile is quite nutty, dominated as it is by layers of blanched and roasted almond, hazelnut and walnut. The underlying yeastiness smells like fruitcake; a fruitcake that would not be so much about dried and crystallised fruits but mainly about molasses, caramelised orange peel and lemon rind, allspice (cinnamon, clove and nutmeg) and curry spice (cardamom and fenugreek). The overall effect is reminiscent of a cross between old brandy and rice pudding.

Palate:

This medium-plus-bodied wine tastes bone dry. The wine has been fortified to a high level of alcohol and since the acidity is medium-plus, there is a lot of mouth-watering action happening here. Further salivation is triggered by an underlying tang of salinity and citrus character. The bitterness of orange peel and lemon rind is enhanced by a dry quality of spiciness and nuttiness. That profile of medium-plus intensity stimulates the palate in the most dynamic way right to the end of the finish of long length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is very good. One can easily read the signature profile of combined nuttiness, yeastiness and citrus tang that a phase of biological ageing achieved. The subsequent phase of physico-chemical ageing helped add depth of flavours and layers of complexity. The elegant liveliness of this wine speaks volumes in favour of dynamic ageing in solera. By concentrating the citrus sharp acids, a mouth-stimulating, dynamic effect ensued. Amontillado is one of the rare wines that can match tricky ingredients like green asparagus and artichoke. It works well with all sorts of Spanish charcuterie, ranging from cured or air-dried meats to chorizo. Grilled or deep-fried fish and strong cheeses are great pairings too.

(4) CANTEIRO SYSTEM

1989 « Sercial » Vinhos Pereira d'Olivera (Est. 1820)

Madeira, Portugal

In the Roman era, if an age-worthy wine wasn't particularly high in alcohol, it had to be high in acidity. The need for that high acidity, high alcohol combination to stabilise wine is demonstrated by the use of defructum. This grape juice inspissated by boiling results in a syrup which is nothing more than a sugar and acid concentrate. The addition of defructum prior to fermentation must therefore be understood as an acidification method as well as a form of "chaptalisation". Some grape varieties are naturally so high in acidity that they can do without defructum to deliver a naturally stable wine. Surrentine wine was as high in acidity as Falernian wine was high in alcohol, which made them both as infamous as one another. Surrentine wine was so thin and austere, if not harsh in youth that Athenaeus recommended ageing it for at least 25 years to bring some fatness to it. Even then, the mellower offering remained an acquired taste that required getting used to. Had it not been for its medicinal properties praised by the physicians of the period, Surrentine wine might not have been named one of the seven Roman wines allowed a special high price in the edict issued by Emperor Diocletian in 301AD. Surrentine wine did not actually achieve prominence before the second half of Augustus' reign in the first century AD and never would it win universal approval, Tiberius describing it as "high-class vinegar" and Caligula as nothing other than "noble plonk". Sercial Madeira is probably as close in style to Surrentine wine as wine can get. Sercial originates from Bucelas, near Lisbon, where the grape has traditionally been grown under the name of Esgana Cão, the Portuguese for Dog Strangler. Could there be a more derogatory way to refer to a grape's fierce astringency of acidity? The similarity between Sercial Madeira and Surrentine wine doesn't stop here. In terms of maturation, they are almost identical too. Frasqueiras, as vintage wines are called in Madeira, are aged in seasoned American oak whereas Surrentine wine was aged in pitch-lined amphora, but that difference is not relevant. For a question of ease of transport in an empire built on international trade, the transition from the hazardous earthenware container of the Mediterranean to the more practical wooden barrel of Celtic Gaul was indeed complete by the beginning of the 4th century AD. Vessels made of clay carried on being used but only as fermenters, like the dolia-like tinaja still to be found in the Andalusian winery at Pérez Barquero today. The resemblance between the two wines doesn't lie with the actual ageing container itself but with the environment to which that container is exposed in the first few years of the maturation process. As we saw earlier, the Romans considered old wine not only more grateful to the palate but more wholesome and invigorating. Today, one knows not to store wine next to a heat source, for it is a sure way to spoil it, but since the Romans saw heat as a means to hasten a wine's development, keeping it right above the bath-furnace in the so-called fumarium was the most sensible thing to do. Similarly, frasqueiras must be stored for a legal minimum of two years in the loft of the lodges exposed to outside temperature variations. The practice forces the deliberate oxidation process that makes Madeira indestructible, and Sercial so much so that it represents the majority of the century-old bottlings still available on the market.

Wine description:	D'Oliveiras Sercial Madeira
Vintage dated:	1989 <i>bottled in 2018</i>
Producer:	Pereira d' Oliveira (Vinhos) Lda (Est. 1820) geral@doliveiras.pt
Winemaker:	Aníbal d'Oliveira <i>Aníbal's son Filipe became the family company's 6th generation of winemakers after his death in 2017</i>
Indication of origin:	Madeira, Portugal
Style:	Dry fortified wine aged in wood by the Canteiro process <i>Madeira is an example of mountain viticulture on terraces in sub-tropical climate. The vines are pergola-trained as a means to grow the grapes well above the ground to try and avoid the fungal diseases that hot and humid conditions are bound to trigger. The basaltic soil of volcanic origin helps boost acidity levels in the grapes. Every year at harvest time, agents working on behalf of the company purchase grapes of the highest quality from reputable growers who own vineyards in different parts of the island of Madeira. Sercial is the driest style of Madeira. The cultivar struggles to ferment to 11% of alcohol, at which stage the wine is fortified with 96% proof brandy to a ratio of 1 part raw spirit to 9 parts wine. No more than 20% of the production is bottled for early consumption, the bulk being aged in the company's lodges in Funchal (some of the wines date as far back as 1850). Frasqueiras like this vintage Sercial are stored in the top-floor ageing rooms of the lodges, right under the rafters. There, they are subjected to the outside temperature variations for minimum legal requirement of two years. The rest of the ageing process takes place in the lower-ground cellars at cooler temperatures according to the canteiro ageing system, which means that the wine is kept in the same cask for the entire duration of its ageing process till bottling.</i>
Assemblage:	100% Sercial
Alcohol:	20%abv
Residual sugar:	49 g/l <i>transitional threshold between the "extra dry" and the "dry" style according to industry regulations</i>
Total Acidity:	8.84 g/l
PH:	3.34
Stopper:	T-top cork
Capacity:	75cl
Supplier:	Bovey Wines (exclusive UK agent since 1986) www.boveywines.co.uk
UK retail price:	£104.50 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19



Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. It is medium amber in colour with a green tinge on the rim. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean despite a degree of volatility that is nothing unusual in old wines with such a high sugar and acid content. That bottle sickness will dissipate soon after the cork is pulled. The nose exhibits a medium-plus intensity of deliberately oxidised aromas. Walnut, roasted almond and curry spice (turmeric, fenugreek, cardamom... and cinnamon, which gives out that delightful scent of rice pudding when the glass is empty) all contribute a rancio quality to the richness of raisin, fig, prune, apple brandy, salted caramel, brown sugar, milk chocolate mocha and orange peel.

Palate:

This medium-bodied wine is ambiguous in terms of sweetness. It does feel medium-dry despite technically qualifying as dry under industry regulations. The wine is fortified to a high level of alcohol and the acidity is equally high, to the point that one wonders which one of the two makes the mouth water the most. The flavours of pronounced intensity are underpinned by the rancio character of walnut and almond, which, in combination to coffee bean, milk chocolate and salted caramel creates an effect reminiscent of Turrón Duro. Layers of spice like vanilla, cinnamon, clove, nutmeg and cardamom add complexity. The dried fruit is overwhelmed by the citric tang that drives the palate. It is indeed all about the lemon, the lime and the orange (juice, peel and all) in the finish of long length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is outstanding. One could do with more fruit flavours to add flesh onto the bones of this wine's huge structure. Members did find the citrus-sharp quality of acidity challenging indeed. This is nonetheless a miracle of complexity and integration. Enjoy this wine on its own or with smoked or salt-cured fish like the Andalusian tuna dish Mojama. All Madeira goes well with cheese, nuts and game. It also has a famous affinity with all things mushroom.

(5) ESTUFAGEM SYSTEM

5-Year-Old « Fine Rich Reserve » Justino's (Est.1970)

Madeira, Portugal

In the 18th century, Madeira was shipped to the American colonies and would experience extremes of weather during the long sea crossing through the tropics. Shippers discovered that, as a result, Madeira tasted better when the casks arrived at their destination, and better still when any unsold cargo returned home. The motion of the waves and the varying maritime temperatures accelerated the maturation process. Through deliberate oxidation, not only did Madeira wine gain greater levels of complexity but it was rendered virtually indestructible. Wine improved by boat trips, known in Portuguese as Vinho da Roda or Vinho de Torna Viagem, was made right until the end of 19th century. However, increased market demand meant that alternative solutions to reproduce that style of fortified wine in the comfort of the winery had to be found. The canteiro system described in the previous chapter helped yield the finest of wines after years of maturation in wood. Still, the process remained time-consuming, labour-intensive and costly. In 1794, a physician named Pantelião Fernandes eventually introduced a much more cost-effective process known as estufagem, which consisted of heating the wine for three months to 50°C. The resulting style lacked sophistication, marked as it was by an altogether stewed, baked and confected, if not burnt quality of fruit, yet it met with great popularity. The present 5-year-old Madeira by Justino's was made by the estufagem process like 90% of the production today. The label makes no mention of a grape variety, for the wine is not made from a noble Madeiran cultivar but from the versatile Tinta Negra Mole that dominated the replanting programme in the aftermath of the phylloxera devastation of 1872. The wine is presented as being "rich", meaning that it is made to resemble Malmsey, the sweetest and most popular style of Madeira. One cannot underestimate the impact of climate change on the taste for certain styles of wine. When growing conditions are so cold that only thin wines with no ageing potential can be produced, fashion tends to privilege sweeter styles designed for keeping. It was certainly the case before and after the phase of auspicious weather known as Optimum Climaticum that graced the mid-medieval era from the year 1000 and led to the expansion of the European vineyard by Christian institutions up to the northernmost recesses of the continent, notably the Rhine Valley and even Scotland. Before then, 800 years of cold weather forced the winemakers of Roman Italy to resort to inspissation to produce cooked wines and Vino Greco sweet-enough to compete with the dried-grape wines of Greece. Optimum Climaticum did not last more than 300 years before it gave way to the Little Ice Age that lasted until the Irish Potato Famine of 1850. Throughout those difficult times, European connoisseurs developed a sweet tooth once again, and the only wines produced which could satisfy their craving were either the Sack of Andalusia or the Malmsey of Greece. 15th century England could not get enough of Sack and Malmsey. Those sweet dried-grape wines were kept in good supply by the merchants of Venice and when Venice lost Crete to the Turks in 1564, losing their main source of Malmsey together with it, wine branded as Malmsey kept coming (one just had to have it made elsewhere from totally unrelated grapes)! Only after the Dutch took over the North European market would Malmsey come to strictly describe Madeira wine made from the Malvasia Candida of Cretan origin.

Wine description: Justino's Fine Rich Reserve Madeira
Age-dated: 5 Years Old
Producer: Justino's Madeira (Est. 1870) justinosmadeira.com
Winemaker: Juan Teixeira
Indication of origin: Madeira, Portugal
Style: Sweet fortified wine aged in wood by the Estufagem process

Madeira is an example of mountain viticulture on terraces in sub-tropical climate. The vines are pergola-trained as a means to grow the grapes well above the ground to try and avoid the fungal diseases that hot and humid conditions are bound to trigger. The basaltic soil of volcanic origin helps boost acidity levels in the grapes. Every year at harvest time, agents working on behalf of the Justino's Madeira Wine company purchase grapes of the highest quality from reputable growers with vineyards in different parts of the island. This commercial style of Madeira is made out of a black grape variety called Tinta Negra. Since the latter is not recognised as a noble cultivar, its name cannot appear on the label. The grapes are destemmed, crushed then the pressed juice is cold fermented at 16°C in a stainless steel tank with regular pumping over the cap for maximum extraction over three days. To achieve this rich level of sweetness, the grape must is fortified with 96% proof grape spirit in the early stage of the fermentation process to a ratio of 1 part spirit to 4 parts wine. The resulting fortified wine is then artificially aged by the estufagem process, meaning that the wine is heated to temperatures of 45°C to 50°C for three months. The wine is then aged in season American wood for 5 years till blending.



Assemblage: 100% Tinta Negra
Alcohol: 19%abv
Residual sugar: 107.3 g/l *this level of sweetness qualifies as "Rich" under industry regulations*
Total Acidity: 8.6 g/l
PH: 3.31
Stopper: T-top cork
Capacity: 75cl
Supplier: Liberty Wines www.libertywines.co.uk
UK retail price: £24.00 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19

Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. It is deep amber in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean despite notes of white pepper suggesting a degree of volatility that is nothing unusual in wines with such a high sugar and acid content. That bottle sickness will dissipate soon after the cork is pulled. The nose exhibits a medium intensity of deliberately oxidised aromas. The stewed prune and backed apple fruit almost smells like it has been steeped into molasses. However, that sticky richness is balanced by the acrid edge of walnut and burnt caramel and a savoury scent of soy sauce, resulting in a rancio character which is almost tar-like.

Palate:

This medium-plus-bodied wine is positively sweet. The medium-plus acidity offsets the medium-plus level of alcohol to which the wine has been fortified. The fruit has a rather confected edge, with notes of toffee apple, tinned prunes and lemon drops. The flavour profile is very reminiscent of over-backed apple, the mixture of butter, brown sugar, cinnamon and sultana having turned into burnt caramel in the over. The finish is moreish but of medium length only.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is very good. It delivers complexity and one can bet their dollar that members will find this age-dated blend more attractive and far less challenging than the Sercial Frasqueira! However, one cannot help but read the actual "cooking" process in the altogether stewed, backed, confected and often burnt quality of the aromas and flavours. By forcing development through heat, the estufagem process bypasses some of the subtle chemical reactions that occur through a much slower ageing process in wood. This style consequently lacks the sophistication and integration of a vintage wine aged by the Canteiro process. This wine will pair well with chocolate, cakes and puddings such as tiramisu, tarte Tatin, toffee pudding, Christmas cake and mince pies. All Madeira also goes well with cheese, nuts and game.

(6) MISTELLE = VIN DE LIQUEUR

NV « Carthagène Rouge » Château Mire l'Etang (Est. 1972)

La Clape, Aude, Languedoc, France

So far, I have been talking about fortified wines without mentioning anything about the elephant in the room. In order to fortify wine, distillates need to be commercially available, don't they? So when did fortification become common practice? The art of distilling brandy and other spirits was first brought into Europe by the Moors in 1150AD. The Moors invaded Gibraltar in 711AD then took control of most of the Iberian Peninsula for almost 800 years. Many think that the wealth of knowledge and technology they brought with them from the Fertile Crescent and North Africa amounted to no less than the first European Renaissance. The Moors learnt the secret of distillation from the Egyptians, who were said to have practiced it in the reign of Emperor Diocletian around the turn of the 4th century AD, though it was unknown to the Ancient Greeks and Romans. I have always struggled to square the circle of where fortified wine was produced for the first time. In all logic, it had to have seen the light of day in Andalusia, for wasn't Andalusia the last stronghold of Muslim occupation at the end of the Spanish Reconquista in 1492? And, since Cristopher Columbus launched from Huelva the expedition that led to the discovery of the Americas that same year, was Sherry the first fortified wine ever to have been drunk in the New World? No. If one knew about distillation at the time, it was only used to make perfume or for medicinal purposes. The breakthrough came with an interest that the Dutch had in wine and the requirements of the long-distance transportation of this perishable product by sea. In the 13th century, the Dutch had a monopoly of Baltic and Scandinavian trade and by the end of the 16th century their fleet equalled the combined commercial fleet of Spain and Portugal. By the time demand for Sack and Madeiran Malmsey had grown very high in England, the Dutch had already entered the market, having gained access to Atlantic trade and the estuaries of all the wine rivers; Rhine, Meuse, Seine, Loire, Garonne, Douro and Guadalquivir. By the middle of the 17th century, the Dutch Republic eventually achieved a dominant position in the world trade in wines and spirits, greater even than that of England. A few decades later, stabilising every wine cargo using Dutch sulphur candles and spirit became the routine; fortified wines were born. The establishment of distilleries in western France and the planting of the white grapes needed for this emerging industry was a direct result of the taste of the Dutch for brandy. Since harvest occurred too late for wine to be ready for shipment to the northern lands in time before the Baltic and White Seas became impassable, the Dutch popularised Mistelles. Beware, for if Liqueur Wine is the official EU term for fortified wine, Vin de Liqueur is also the term for those mistelles made in France by adding spirit to unfermented grape juice rather than to wine. Under EU regulations, wine must be the result of a fermentation process, even partial. Vin de Liqueur is therefore not, strictly speaking, fortified wine. The category includes the Pineau des Charentes of Cognac and its Armagnac counterpart Floc de Gascogne, but also Macvin du Jura made from Marc. Other regions have their own unregulated versions, like Champagne with its Ratafia or Languedoc with the Carthagène listed here. Since Mistelles display no secondary products of fermentation such as glycerol or succinic acid, they are intrinsically less complex and textured than a wine that owes its alcohol content to fermentation, but they are much more stable.

Wine description: Château Mire l'Étang, Carthagène Rouge
Vintage dated: NV *the grapes are from one single harvest but the Chamayrac family opted not to indicate the vintage*
Producer: Château Mire l'Étang (Est. 1972) www.chateau-mire-letang.com
Cellar Master: Claude Gros
Indication of origin: La Clape, Aude, Languedoc, France
Style: VdL / Mistelle = unfermented grape juice stabilised by mutage

The vines are grown on calcareous clay in a hot and dry Mediterranean climate tempered by the proximity of the Mediterranean Sea. The grapes are picked at full ripeness then destemmed and crushed. Since the Syrah grape is so rich in phenolics, its juice is racked off the skins after no more than 24 hours of maceration to minimise the extraction of harsh tannins. This saignée method is usually used in the making of rosé wines, so why is this Vin de Liqueur so deep in colour? Since the average black grape displays a flesh that is as white as that of a white grape, the reason behind this Vin de Liqueur's ruby hue is that Alicante Bouschet is a Teinturier grape. In other words, its juicy flesh is as red as its thin skin is red. Brandy from the Languedoc is used in the mutage process. The raw grape spirit with a minimum alcoholic strength of 65% is added to the grape juice before the latter gets any chance to ferment. That fortification process is done to a ratio of 1 part raw grape spirit to 3 parts unfermented grape juice ("four quarters" hence the Occitan name "Cartagena"). One cannot speak of residual sugars here, for no fermentation is involved. The sugar content is indeed that of the grapes themselves and the alcohol is pure added ethanol from the fortifying brandy alone. Under EU law, Vin de Liqueur must have an alcoholic strength of no less than 16% and not more than 22%. This Vin de Liqueur is bottled straight away to maximise its freshness of fruit character. The producer claims that their product can hold that freshness for a few years in that bottle but I suspect that their not mentioning a vintage date on the label aims at not giving consumers the means of tracking the bottling date. One can indeed be put off by a wine that would have been sitting on the shelf for too long.



Assemblage: Syrah, Alicante Bouschet
Alcohol: 16.5%abv
Sugar content: 146.3 g/l
Total Acidity: 2.25 g/l
PH: 3.99
Stopper: Extruded plastic cork *sign that a wine is designed to be drunk in the first year or two after it was bottled*
Capacity: 75cl
Supplier: Cave Suffren (retail shop in Le Barcares, Roussillon, France) for €12.00
UK retail price: Was the wine to be distributed in the UK, it would sell for around £16.50 per bottle

Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. It is medium ruby in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean. It displays a medium intensity of developing aromas. The dark fruit has a boozy quality to it, with notes of kirsch in the black cherry, crème de cassis in the blackcurrant, eau de vie in the plum and brandy in the prune. Underlying notes of dark bitter chocolate combine with a touch of mint to create an effect very reminiscent of After Eight.

Palate:

This medium-bodied wine is sweet. The medium acidity does not manage to offset the medium level of alcohol to which the wine has been fortified. The flavours of medium-plus intensity have the same boozy quality as the aromas described on the nose, yet the fruit is vibrant with freshness. If the tannins are so low that one could almost forget to notice them, they give a velvety quality of texture to the mouthfeel. The finish is moreish but of medium length only.

Assessment of quality:

This drink is very good (since no fermentation process was involved and the entire alcohol content is added ethanol, Vin de Liqueur does not technically qualify as wine). In order to prevent the bite of alcohol, one needs to serve any sort of mistelle like this Carthagène well-chilled. The fruit character of this drink is simple, yet decadently fruity and satisfyingly moreish and easy to drink. Members will certainly be seduced by this crowd pleaser. Carthagène is a symbol of hospitality in the Languedoc. Local growers have been producing it for domestic consumption mostly, traditionally serving it as an aperitif at weddings and on any celebratory occasion or simply to make guests feel welcome. Magda thinks that mixed as a Kir, notably with Prosecco, this mistelle could find one of its most delicious applications. Red Carthagène pairs well with red fruit salads or dark chocolate desserts in general.

(7) PORT = VIN DOUX NATUREL

2003 « Vintage Port » Quinta do Noval (Est.1715)

Pinhão Valley, Douro, Portugal

Almost as soon as the art of distillation was introduced into Western Europe, it was discovered that distilled wine had the power to stop fermentation in its course, thereby reliably retaining the sweetness so prized by our forebears. The Catalan Arnau de Vilanova of Montpellier University's then flourishing medical school perfected this process called "mutage". He was granted a patent for it in 1299 by the king of Majorca, then ruler of Roussillon, a region which was to become the world's centre of Vin Doux Naturel production. If Britons know mutage, it is through Port. Port takes its name from the northern Portuguese city of Oporto whence the wine has been shipped for well over 300 years. Port was created by the British for the British market at a time when war with the French meant that the English no longer had access to their favourite tipples. Would that make Vin Doux Naturel the precursor of Port by some 400 years? Considering the ambiguity of the term Vin Doux Naturel, I would say no. Vin Doux Naturel translates as Natural Sweet Wine. Since there is nothing particularly natural about sweetness preserved by mutage, I would suggest that the name must refer to the making of wine from dried grapes. The tradition of dried-grape wines was introduced in the Roussillon by the Greeks in around 600BC. When did the transition to mutage take place exactly? It is hard to pinpoint. All we know is that the originality of that production was recognised by the Arago decree of 1872 and that the actual "Vin Doux Naturel" denomination was eventually introduced by the Pams decree of 1898. In all fairness, things are no clearer when it comes to Port. Since the common practice in the 18th century was to add brandy at the time of shipment to fortify wine against the rigors of the sea voyage, one must assume that Port was a dry wine in its early days. Producers who used the oenological tool that is mutage to make Port as we know it today were the exception. The turning point came with the exceptional harvest of 1820. In later vintages, Port had to be fortified in the course of its fermentation process in order to replicate the same decadent quality of fruit and longevity of style. Many prominent figures of the Port industry such as Baron Forrester fiercely opposed mutage, but fashion meant that the controversial practice became widespread in the 1840s and eventually universal from around 1850 onwards. In the end, what turned out to be a real revolution for the Port Industry wasn't mutage but the ageing of wine in glass bottles stoppered with the newly rediscovered cork. Connoisseurs initiated the trend in late 17th century England. Pouring a vibrantly ruby-coloured Claret or Port from the bottle must have felt like switching on colour TV for the first time in the 1970s! It would be unfair to compare the adulterated profile of a wine made to a recipe like Vinum Graecum with the sophistication of wines resilient-enough to sustain extended oxidative ageing, yet there is something quite formulaic about them all. Biologically aged Sherry always displays similar notes of blanched almond, lemon rind and bread dough. As for Tawny Port, deliberate oxidation always ends up layering its dried-fruit profile with the same rancio quality of nuttiness and curry-like spiciness. David Guimaraens likes to call Tawny Port the no-brainer because of that predictability. In contrast, Vintage Port is a direct expression of the terroir of the Douro Valley that will keep on stimulating the mind of aficionados throughout the many decades of its slow maturation in the bottle. This is why Port is the only fortified wine still enjoying a level of popularity nowadays!

Wine description:	Quinta do Noval Vintage Port
Vintage dated:	2003 <i>bottled in the spring of 2005</i> <i>The hottest summer followed the wettest winter, thereby providing ideal conditions for perfect balance between the high levels of sugar and matching acidity in the grapes. 2003 was universally declared a classic vintage year by the Port industry.</i>
Producer:	Quinta do Noval (Est. 1715) www.quintadonoval.com <i>Christian Seely has been managing Quinta do Noval on behalf of the French group AXA Millésime since 1993.</i>
Winemaker:	António Agrellos
Indication of origin:	Quinta do Noval, south of Val de Mendiz on the left bank of the Pinhão River Cima Corgo region of the Douro Valley, Portugal
Style:	Bottle-aged red wine kept sweet by mutage half way through fermentation <i>Vintage Port is the king style of Port and the only true terroir-driven style of fortified wine. Quinta do Noval is a bit of an exception amongst Port shippers when it comes to vintage Port. British shippers traditionally make two distinct styles of Vintage Port. The style they prioritise is a blend of wines of different origins across the Douro Valley in exceptional years. Such Classic Vintage Port is usually declared 3 times per decade on average. Classic Vintage Port is bottled after two winters in seasoned wood then put to market straight away. It is the consumer who will have to mature a Classic Vintage Port in the bottle for several decades until its huge structure mellows and the wine becomes ready to drink. Alternatively, British shippers will grow a single-estate style of Vintage Port in years when the quality of the harvest is very good, yet not outstanding. Only the best wine of a Port House's flagship quinta is bottled as Vintage Port in those intervening years hence the style is known as Single-quinta Vintage Port. If Single-quinta Vintage Port is also bottled after one year and a half in wood, it is the Port house who takes the responsibility of maturing the wine, only releasing it onto the market after 10 years. In stark contrast to that business model, Noval's Vintage Port is 100% harvested from their single estate in the Pinhão Valley. The wine will only be produced when the quality meets the exacting standards of the house around four times per decade. Blending is what shippers do, apart from Noval, which will be better understood as the Port industry's oldest shipping quinta. Port is grown on schistous rock in the Douro Valley, which is an example of mountain viticulture on terraces in hot and dry continental climate. Since 1994, Quinta do Noval have converted 2/3 of their vineyard to block planting of selected noble grape varieties. The hand-picked grapes are foot-trodden in the lagares of the quinta, as it is the tradition with Vintage Port. As soon as half the sugars in the juice are metabolised into alcohol, the residual sweetness is preserved by mutage. The fermentation process is interrupted by an addition of 76% proof grape spirit to a ratio of 1 part brandy to 4 parts fermenting grape must. The resulting wine is held in seasoned American oak for 18 months then bottled with no treatment or filtration.</i>
Assemblage:	Touriga Nacional, Touriga Francesca, Tinta Roriz, Tinta Barroca
Alcohol:	19.5%abv
Residual sugar:	90.5 g/l <i>just about qualifies as sweet under industry regulations</i>
Total Acidity:	5.11 g/l
PH:	3.75
Stopper:	Natural cork <i>sign that a Port wine requires decanting before serving as opposed to a T-top cork</i>
Capacity:	75cl
Supplier:	bought en primeur from Paragon Vintners (no longer trading since 2009)
UK retail price:	£69.50 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19



Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. It is deep ruby in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean. It displays a medium-plus intensity of developing aromas. The nose is tight-woven and closed, yet one can sense its huge power underneath it all. There is not a single whiff of ethanol on the nose, only fresh fruit. The blackcurrant, dark plum and black cherry fruit is underpinned by black pepper, clove, liquorice and dark, bitter chocolate. Some a mineral-boosted quality of fresh herbs lifts that profile altogether.

Palate:

This full-bodied wine is sweet. The medium-plus acidity perfectly offsets the high level of alcohol to which the wine has been fortified. The tannins are high, yet they are so fine and ripe that they result in a chocolate-sauce-like sort of texture. The blackcurrant, plum and dark cherry fruit of medium-plus intensity is full of mineral precision and herby freshness. However, there are also boozy notes of kirsh, eau de vie de prune and crème de cassis. Together with the bitterness of mocha, that liqueur-like character produces an effect very reminiscent of Black Forest gâteau in the finish of long length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is outstanding. The acidity, the alcohol and the intensity of fruit are in perfect balance. The profile of this wine is full of freshness and mineral precision. The wine will require another ten years of development at least before it can deliver its full potential. Since the terroir character of this wine hasn't been adulterated by any form of winemaking process, there is a real sense of time and place here. If walnuts and dried fruits such as apricots and figs are an excellent accompaniment to Vintage Port, Stilton and other blue cheeses are recognised as classic pairings. Vintage Port can also be savoured on its own in good company.

(8) RELIQUARY OF A DYING TRADITION

NV *Solera Est. 1957* « Tintilla de Rota Noble, Vino de Licor » Bodegas El Gato (Est. 1957)
Rota, Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain

It will take no more than 600 years from the foundation of their capital city in 753BC for the Romans to eventually topple the two competing powers of the day: Carthage and its territories stretching from the Levant to the southernmost tip of Iberia along the north African coast, and Greece, which included the coast of Asia Minor and Thrace as well as the Aegean islands and the Balkans, plus a multitude of settlements around the Black Sea and along the north coast of the Mediterranean, notably in modern Calabria, Sicily and Catalan regions. The destruction of Carthage and Corinth in 146BC marked the end of the Punic wars (the term Punic referring to the Phoenician ancestry of Carthage) and the beginning of the Romanisation of Greece. But did the Romans really impose their views on the conquered or did the sophisticated cultures of the conquered come flooding in? Some could argue that the Romans actually indulged in cultural appropriation. One notably made sure that the seminal works of Hesiod and Mago on farming (and more particularly on viticulture and winemaking) were safeguarded before both cities were burnt to the ground. That knowledge had had a bit of a journey already. Severe drought and flood episodes did force it out of the Caucasus and Mesopotamia, where the vine was domesticated for the first time in around 4000BC, then catastrophic events in the eastern Mediterranean in around 1200BC eventually pushed the Greeks and Phoenicians to spread it westward to the opposite side of the Mediterranean. Wherever they settled, the Greeks and the Phoenicians established a local wine industry. Of all the wines they produced, only their dried-grape wines had trading value, for no other wine was stable-enough to travel. The drying process aimed at concentrating the sugar in the grapes to a level so high that it would become poisonous to the fermenting yeast, resulting in a naturally sweet wine. In order to achieve matching levels of acidity, the grapes were picked early then dried under the sun. Alternatively, the stem of every bunch was twisted before the grapes had reached full maturity to trigger the drying process on the vine itself. Mago's seminal treaties only survive in fragments like those quoted by Columella in Cádiz, a city founded by the Phoenicians some 3100 years ago. The present wine was produced in Rota, a stone throw from Cádiz. El Gato is the oldest producer of "classic" Tintilla de Rota and the only bodega still operating in Rota itself. They grow no more than 2ha of vines and couldn't grow much more, for most of the local vineyard was taken over by the construction of a US military base in 1953. This Tintilla de Rota is therefore a dying tradition. It is also some sort of a reliquary of all the stabilising techniques used since viticulture was introduced in the region; grape drying echoes the noble Phoenician practice, inspissation the more commercial approach the Romans borrowed from the Greeks, and fortification the modern solution brought by the Dutch. This complex heritage seems to blend seamlessly through the solera system, yielding a wine with an incredible level of concentration. It is an almost invariable rule that anywhere hot enough to produce good fortified wine is too hot to provide the ideal climate for its consumption. I take it that even the target consumer in the North, now used to more youthful styles of dry wines, will find this syrup-like offering rather challenging too!

Wine description:	Tintilla de Rota Noble, Vino de Licor Una Selección de J. Martínez
Vintage:	NV bottled in 2019 from a solera established in 1957
Producer:	Bodegas El Gato (Est. 1957 by José Martínez Arana) www.bodegaselgato.com
Winemaker:	Juan Martínez Martín since 1969 then granddaughter Ana Navarro Martínez <i>Juan's daughter Laura López Martínez has been running her grandad's business since 1987</i>
Indication of origin:	Rota, Cádiz, Andalusia, Spain <i>This wine is not labelled as DO Jerez-Xérès-Sherry because Tintilla de Rota is not an authorised grape within the denomination</i>
Style:	Solera-aged, fortified wine from sun-dried grapes with addition of grape syrup <i>Tintilla de Rota is an autochthone cultivar that has been grown in the ocean-influenced Mediterranean climate of the Atlantic coast of Cádiz for at least 500 years. The black grape variety is named after the local town of Rota, which is situated between Sanlúcar de Barrameda and El Puerto de Santa María. Since Tintilla has traditionally been planted on sandy soils, in which the phylloxera aphid cannot thrive, it remains ungrafted. The direct producer yields delicate bunches of tiny berries which contain so little juice that plenty of the "grape caviar" is needed to produce small quantities of high-quality wine. Tintilla is harvested in early September once the grapes have reached full maturity. To avoid damaging them, the healthy bunches are picked by hand and carefully arranged in a single layer in boxes before being carefully transported to the winery. The grapes undergo 4 to 5 days of sunning before they are destemmed. As the juice starts to ferment on the skins in stainless-steel tanks, grape syrup called arrope is added. Part of the grape juice will have indeed been put aside and boiled to evaporate 20% of its water content and concentrate the sugars and the acids. Since that inspissation process results in a deep-coloured syrup, arrope is also known as Vino de Color. The cooking process used to take place over the naked flame of a wood fire until recently but mechanised solutions have now been introduced. To preserve as much of the sweetness in the juice of the sun-dried grapes left to co-ferment with the arrope, the process is interrupted in its early stage by mutage. The alcohol content is elevated to 17% with an addition of brandy, which kills the yeast. The fortified wine is left to integrate until it is eventually clarified, cold-stabilised and filtered. The resulting sobretabla can then enter the Solera & Criaderas system that was established by José Martínez in 1957, the same year he established Bodega El Gato.</i>
Assemblage:	100% Tintilla de Rota <i>also known as Graciano in La Rioja</i>
Alcohol:	17%abv
Stopper:	T-top cork
Capacity:	75cl
Supplier:	Wine bought from Bodega El Gato's cellar door shop for €31.20 per bottle
UK retail price:	Was the wine to be distributed in the UK, it would sell for around £35.50 per bottle



Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. One cannot see through it as it is opaque, yet the rim indicates that it is green-tinged brown in colour. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean. It exhibits a medium-plus intensity of deliberately oxidised aromas. The liquorice-scented dried fruit (fig, prune, date, raisin and all) dominates the aromatic profile hence one can expect to taste a sticky-sweet wine. However, integrated notes of orange peel, burnt caramel, walnut, coffee bean and dark chocolate are bound to deliver balancing bitterness on the palate. A hint of roasted seaweed might well add savouriness to that equation also. Ultimately, a complex cocktail of herby and flowery aromas reminiscent of Jägermeister lifts the nose with a medicinal quality of freshness.

Palate:

This medium-plus-bodied wine does taste lusciously sweet, no surprise there. The medium-plus acidity offsets the medium level of alcohol to which the wine has been fortified but fails to balance the richness of flavours contrary to what one was anticipating. The dry, bitter quality of the mocha, citrus peel and burnt sugar is swamped by the sickly sweetness of treacle tart, molasses, fig paste and other dried fruits. As for that medicinal refreshment the nose was promising, it does not materialise in the finish of medium-plus length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine is very good. Thanks to its medicinal character, Tintilla de Rota is nothing as sickly-sweet as its Pedro Ximénez cousin, yet it remains a difficult wine to match with food. A single glass of the stuff will amount to a meal of its own. One can pour it on top of vanilla ice cream as a substitute to chocolate sauce. If diabetic, seek medical approval before drinking!

(9) QUEST FOR IDENTITY

NV 15-20 Years Old « Grand Rutherglen Topaque » Stanton & Killeen (Est.1875)

Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia

Now that Australia has become the UK's biggest supplier of table wine, it is easy to forget that the bulk of their exports was fortified wine until as recently as in the 1970s. Cuttings from vines planted in the South African way station of the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-17th century were brought to the penal colony of Botany Bay in New South Wales by Governor Phillip on the First Fleet in 1788. Not until the 1820s will wine production develop to a scale large-enough to satisfy the Australian domestic market. In the 1830s, at a time when Australia was already growing most international grape varieties and a good selection of cultivars for fortified wine production, father of Australian viticulture James Busby introduced the Sherry model from Andalusia into South Australia (which is the reason why the Barossa Valley is named after La Barrosa beach in Cádiz). In the early 1850s, all the premier wine regions of Australia we know today were established but the turning point in terms of exports came with the principle of Imperial Preference that was enforced in the UK in the first half of the 20th century. Imperial Preference was a three-tier system of taxation on food imports which made sure that domestic producers came first, producers from the Empire second, and foreign producers last. Not only did that tax regime seal the destiny of Australia and the Cape as two of Britain's main suppliers of sweet and fortified wine but it gave rise to the ghastly British wine industry. British wine is a decidedly manufactured product made in the image of wine. It is produced out of concentrated grape must imported in bulk all year round from wherever happens to be able to offer the best value. In a huge plant situated just outside London in Kingston-Upon-Thames, the must is reconstituted by adding water to that thin honey-like concentrate then it is fermented using selected yeast strains according to the wine style required. The modern taste for still light wines means that no more than 3% of wine sales in the UK are of fortified wine today. The negative trend led to the making of British wine of normal table wine strength, much to the dismay of the producers of English wine, with whose products from freshly-picked English-grown grapes there is considerable confusion. In the turn of the 20th century however, fortified wines represented a staggering 90% of imports and almost all British wine was made to resemble Sherry or Port well until the 1980s. Most New World wine was made in the style of Sherry or Port also. No wonder that the shippers of Oporto and the Sherry Triangle took offence! In reaction, Europe adopted the appellation system, starting with France in 1936, which put an end to the abuse. From then on, ersatz could only be sold in Europe as Ruby, Tawny, Fino, Amontillado, Oloroso or Cream and no longer as Port or Sherry. Of all the fortified wines of the New World, only the liqueur wines of Rutherglen have managed to make a name for themselves. Known as Tokay in Victoria, the Muscadelle example had to be renamed Topaque in 2016 to comply with EU rules. It is now as visible in the UK as its Muscat counterpart as a result. How did such an unfashionable style become Australia's flagship fortified wine? Simply because it has a true sense of identity. This mistelle from grapes dried on the vine in the desert-like climate of North-Eastern Victoria is aged using techniques inspired by the Madeiran estufagem and the Sherry solera, yet it remains intrinsically Aussie.

Wine description: Grand Rutherglen Topaque
Vintage: NV
Producer: Stanton & Killeen (Est. 1875) www.stantonandkilleenwines.com.au
Winemaker: Andrew Drumm
Indication of origin: Rutherglen, Victoria, Australia
Style: Mistelle by the passerillage process aged in a sun-baked solera system

The grapes undergo a drying process on the vine called passerillage. That drying process is facilitated by the desert-like conditions of the Rutherglen region in the north-eastern corner of Victoria. The grapes will only be picked once they have almost turned into raisins. The sugar-rich grapes are crushed and macerated on the skins until fermentation is about to start, at which point they are pressed and fortified with grape spirit to preserve maximum sweetness. The resulting fortified wine is then racked into oak casks where it is stored for 3 to 4 years until one decides in which tier of the Rutherglen classification system the wine is going to find its best fit: "straight Rutherglen" for immediate consumption, "Classic" after an average of 12 years in oak, "Grand" after 15-20 years or "Rare" after 25 years. If a wine is regarded as special enough to qualify as "Grand" or "Rare", it will enter a fractional blending system housed in a shed of corrugated iron baked in sunshine, which can be described as a hybrid between the Madeira estufagem and the sherry solera. Only small quantities of wine are drawn off the system at a time. The longer the ageing process the more concentrated the sweetness, the acidity (both in terms of TA and PH), the potency of alcohol and the intensity of the wine's profile.



Assemblage: 100% Muscadelle

Over the region's 150 years of viticultural history, the growers of Rutherglen have known Muscadelle as Tokay. However, since Tokay bore the same name as the Hungarian appellation, it could not be sold in the EU hence it was re-baptised Topaque in 2016.

Alcohol: 18.5%abv
Residual sugar: 249 g/l
Total acidity: 5.1 g/l
PH: 3.82
Stopper: Stelvin screw cap with metal seal
Capacity: 37.5cl
UK Importer: Awin Barratt Siegel Wine www.abswineagencies.co.uk
Supplier: Alexander Hadleigh www.ahadleigh-wine.com
UK retail price: £42.50 inc. VAT as per www.wine-searcher.com on 29/10/19

Appearance:

This wine looks clear and bright. It is deep amber in colour. The rim is green-tinged. Legs and tears run along the side of the glass.

Nose:

The wine smells clean despite some white pepper suggesting a degree of volatility that is nothing unusual in wines with such a high sugar and acid content. The nose exhibits an elegantly pronounced intensity of deliberately oxidised aromas. The fruity richness of marmalade, mirabelle or greengage preserve and banoffee pie is lifted by the flowery scent of orange blossom and acacia. The earthy minerality of Manuka honey adds a layer of complexity.

Palate:

This medium-plus bodied wine is lusciously sweet. The medium-plus acidity manages to offset the medium level of alcohol to which the wine has been fortified but fails to balance the wine's richness of profile, with layers of salted caramel, marmalade and stone-fruit preserve on top of layers of marzipan, vanilla, cinnamon and curry spice. Thankfully, a stimulating citric quality of flavours creates a very dynamic effect right to the end of the finish of long length.

Assessment of quality:

This wine falls short of being outstanding, but only just. On paper, it reads as a recipe for total unbalance and sickly-sweetness, yet it works. Shame that there isn't a tad more acidity to cut through the richness. The wine is nonetheless a miracle of integration and understated complexity. There is no food to match this sort of luscious concentration of sweetness, apart from Crème brûlée maybe. Like PX Sherry, Rutherglen Muscat and Rutherglen Topaque are delicious when poured straight onto vanilla ice-cream in preference to chocolate sauce. In this instance however, it would be a waste of a great wine. I would rather suggest enjoying it on its own as a vehicle for contemplation.