



# the bullionaire

BULLION 220



*Rias Baixas, Spain*

A lot of people ask me what my favourite wine is. I don't really have an answer to the question, apart from a very glib, "My Next one!" I find it very difficult to think about a favourite wine, one that I will drink all the time, for there are just so many wines and styles that are constantly changing and evolving. I sincerely hope I never have to narrow my drinking down to a few wines or styles. I do, however, have a favourite country and that country is Spain. The reason is quite simple. The quality and diversity of the wines are extremely high, yet the pricing is still very realistic. Sure, there are some mega expensive wines that every country has and only the wealthy elite can hope to afford or find, but on the whole Spain still offers some excellent value. I put this down to the Asian markets not having embraced the wines from Spain, like they have from France and Italy. Hopefully this will continue. Spain produces some sensational red wines from the regions of Rioja, Ribera de Duero and Priorat and the great whites from Rias Baixas. So, I am glad that we are finishing the year with a focus on Spain and imported wines, with two wines from Spain, one from Portugal and one from Italy.

So, what is it about Spain that I like so much? For me it comes down to the complexity and structure of the wines. It is so easy for wines to be one dimensional, and this is what you tend to get in cheaper wines, but also from more expensive wines as well. Australian Shiraz is a style that I think falls into this category. Sure, the wines are good and technically well made, but they lack the complexity I look for. Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc is another that tends to offer only one dimension. There are obviously several exceptions, but I don't get particularly excited when I taste and drink these wines. Now to say all Spanish wines will give you this complexity and structure is an over simplification, but if you stick to the better regions and learn a few tricks of the trade, then you will get some great wine experiences. The two Spanish wines we have chosen are from great regions that produce distinct styles, one red from Rioja and one white from Rias Baixas.

First up is the white, the **2021 Valminor Albarino from Rias Baixas**. Rias Baixas is a relatively new wine region in the North Western coast of Spain, in the larger region of Galicia.

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# the wines



## 2021 VALMIÑOR, ALBARINO DO *Rías Baixas, Spain*

Established in 1997, Bodegas Valmiñor is situated in the subregion of Rosal in the larger region of Rías Baixas. Valmiñor have 35 ha of their own vineyards, which contribute half their requirements, and collaborate with 100 growers for the balance (with control over viticulture, and extremely strict yield and selection criteria).

The fruit is handpicked, de-stemmed, cold soaked and fermented in stainless tank. Fermentations are long and cool, at around 18 degrees over about 20 days. The winemaker is Cristina Mantilla and the winery is named after the owner, Carlos Gomez Davila's home town near Vigo.

This Albarino has aromas of lime and prickly pear with custard apple richness and a green apple tang. There is a pleasing sense of earthiness underneath, so it's not just a steel tank fruit thing. Nicely controlled nutty phenolics and subtle lees richness help the fruit to achieve volume in the savoury mid-palate. The wine is well-textured through the front palate then glides through to this awesome sense of apple-steely acid, creating great balance and complexity.

### FOOD MATCHINGS

Seafood anyone? Also great as an aperitif.

### CELLARING POTENTIAL

Best drunk in its youth. There is no need to cellar, but you could for another 1-3 years.

Best to enjoy over the next 3-6 months over summer.



## 2018 HACIENDA EL OLMO RIOJA, TEMPRANILLO 'CRIANZA' *Spain*

This wine is made from the grape variety, Tempranillo, from the region of Rioja. Tempranillo is one of the top 5 varieties planted in the world, and whilst not a household name in Australia, in its native Spain, it is both king and queen, responsible for most of the great wines of this country. Here are the correct pronunciations if you want to roll some "r's" around and sound like you have just jetted back from Barcelona.

Tempranillo - tem / prah / NEE / yoh

Rioja - ree OH hah.

Hacienda el Olmo ('estate of the elm tree') is a project based in a little village of Agoncillo, 15km south-east of Logroño. This is on the border of la Rioja and Navarra provinces. A classical crianza style, gentle and elegant, el Olmo is gently fermented, spending three weeks macerating in a temperature-controlled fermentation and then aged 14 months in new and old oak, mainly French.

A medium to full-bodied wine with black fruit and hints of tobacco bouquet with balanced acidity and notes of minerality. These lovely tertiary characteristics are beginning to show. The depth is impressive, with no heaviness, it's all savoury loveliness which maintains a charming openness.

### FOOD MATCHINGS

Roasted meats of most kind; lamb, pork and beef, plus casseroles and mushroom based risottos. Great with blue cheese as well.

### CELLARING POTENTIAL

Decant for 10-15 minutes. Can be safely cellared for another 3-5 years.



## 2018 QUNITO DO VALE DONA MARIA "RUFO" *Tinto, Douro Portugal*

Dona Maria is the property of Cristiano Van Zeller, former owner of legendary Port house Noval. After his family sold Noval, Cristiano set out to promote and foster the "new" table wines of the Douro, focusing on small volume, specialist wineries. He became the driving force behind the "Douro Boys", a collection of great estate-based wineries who co-operated together to join in marketing activities to increase the international profile of the region and the wines. It has now been over 20 years that these wineries have benefited from Cristiano's leadership, slowly achieving not only the recognition of these great wines and the region, but also achieving elegance and finesse in these full flavoured Douros Wines. Each of the wineries are family owned and include Niepoort, Vallado and Meao.

Dona Maria was a property long held in ownership by Cristiano's wife's family and there are around 60 acres of vineyard, half of which are over 50 years old. Around 70% of the production is based around table wines, the balance fortified.

This wine is a blend of 2 grape varieties, Touriga Franca (60%) and Touriga Nacional (40%) from vineyards up to 35 years old. Fermentation took place in stainless steel, and then ageing in French oak for up to 24 months. It is fresh, aromatic and elegant, with great balancing acidity. Red fruits, with a warm baking spice aspect laced with country herbs and a touch of leather. A very appealing and expressive wine. A juicy mid plate with nutty tannins and an elegant long finish.

### **Food Matchings**

This rich, earthy intense red is well matched with rich earthy meats. Think stews and casseroles. Will also match well with grilled meats - think steak, chops and even chicken or pork. Very Versatile.

### **CELLARING POTENTIAL**

Decant for 10-15 minutes before drinking, can be safely cellared for the next 2-5 years.



## 2020 MAURO MOLINO BARBERA D'ALBA *Piedmonte, Italy*

Mauro Molino is a family owned winery that is relatively young by Italian standards, but has quickly become one of the shining lights of Piedmont. In 1973 Mauro graduated from enology school in Alba, and then followed that with five years of winemaking experience in Emilia Romagna. In 1979 after his father's passing, he returned home to the family farm in La Morra and began consulting for local wineries while building up his own estate. 1982 was the first vintage from the famed family parcel in Conca dell'Annunziata, and the rest is history. In 2003 his son joined the company, and then in 2009, his daughter also joined the gang.

This is a very fruit-driven Barbera with plums, light orange peel and hints of hazelnuts. Medium-bodied, crisp and delicious. There are hints of wild herbs and forest fruits, balanced by a juicy mouthfeel and an excellent acidity that is so prominent and typical of good Italian wines, making the wines so enjoyable and a great match with Italian dishes.

### **FOOD MATCHINGS**

This wine pairs well with rich foods, meats, and earthy mushrooms, as well as with lighter types of grilled meat, pasta and tomato-based dishes. I really like it with a rich creamy carbonara that has become a family favourite.

### **CELLARING POTENTIAL**

Decant for 20 minutes before serving. Can be safely cellared for another 4-8 years.



It is a region that is 99% focused on white wine with the majority planted to the Albariño variety. It has fast gained a reputation for Spain's top white wines. But at first glance it is a region that does not seem conducive to quality wine production. It has a rugged, wild looking coastline, where the wind and rain lash the entire region. It has a moderate year-round temperature, ocean mists and a rainfall that is sometimes three times the national average. It is known as the "Green Spain" and very different from the dry, arid almost desert like terrain of Rioja and Ribera Del Duero where the red wines flourish. Galicia's damp Atlantic-influenced climate is, however balanced by over 2,200 hours of sunshine, sufficient to ensure Rías Baixas' signature white grape Albariño ripens fully and is capable of producing wines with good natural acidity and an aromatic profile that make them a delight and a darling of sommeliers and wine lovers all over the world. Albariño offers a light and refreshing body with high acidity. Expect aromas of lemons, limes, pear and occasionally orange zest on the nose, complete with subtle notes of minerality. On the palate, Albariño offers flavours of lemon zest, grapefruit, honeydew, and an almost salty finish, ending with a tingy finish that often has a subtle bitter note. The slight bitter flavour comes from the thick skins of the grapes, though this consequently makes Albariño great for food matching, especially seafood.

The other wine from Spain is from one of the most famous regions of the country, Rioja. It is a region in Central Northern Spain and it is famous for their full-bodied wines made from the Tempranillo grape variety, sometimes including Grenache. Rioja use a simple quality ranking for their wines, based on the time the wine has spent in oak barrels and bottle before it is released. (*Joven* - meaning less than 12 months; *Crianza* – at least 12 months aging in Oak barrels; *Reserva* - 3 years aging with at least 12 months in Barrel; *Gran Reserva* – at least 5 years, 2 years in oak and 3 years in bottle.) It is not surprising that this classification is starting to fall out of favour with winemakers and consumers alike, as just because a wine is aged in oak and bottle, does not necessarily make it a great wine. There is a push for a more regional and single vineyard classification of quality wine in Spain, with some of the better, smaller winemakers not using this "Aged" classification at all when they are marketing/ selling their wines. But for most of the bigger wineries, this classification is still used.

The wine we have chosen is the **2018 Hacienda el Olmo, Crianza Tempranillo**. It is a slightly classier, more elegant example than a traditional Rioja Crianza. It spends three weeks of temperature-controlled maceration, before aging for 14 months in new and old oak, mainly French, as opposed to the traditional American oak. It is a medium to full-bodied Tempranillo from the high-altitude vineyards of Rioja Baja. It does not have the classic Rioja aroma with prominent and sweet lifted American oak characters, rather it is more savoury. It has black fruits and hints of tobacco bouquet with balanced acidity and notes of minerality. At over 4 years of age the tertiary characteristics are beginning to show, with the fruit and the oak starting to mesh together, creating the complexity that we all look for in great wines. This elegance is enhanced by the French oak, versus the US oak.

I was asked another question a few weeks back and that is whether Portugal makes any wine. It surprised me a little for of course there are the very famous fortified wines of Portugal, namely Port. I can get the confusion for whilst these are considered wine, they are a little special and different. Fortified wine used to be all the rage in the 1960's and 70's in Australia, representing most of the production in Australia.

It wasn't until the cask wine boom in the late 1970's that wine started to encroach into Australian's way of life and fortified wines have become a bit of legacy product. In Portugal, this decline was not as dramatic, as there is still a market for high quality fortified wines, but they have also concluded that table wine needs to be a focus. By way of quick definition, a fortified wine is a wine that has been fortified with a spirit to increase the alcohol to 18%. This was necessary in the 18th and 19th century, when transport was by very slow sailing vessels, as this higher alcohol prevented the wine from spoiling, plus of course people enjoyed the higher alcohol, as those sailors could be a rowdy bunch.

So, Portugal is now making some very serious table wines, from the same varieties they make fortified wines, with the better wines being made in the Douro Valley, again where the better fortified wines are made. The Douro is arguably Portugal's most famous wine region and it now produces as much table wine as it does Port. Another interesting fact is that Douro is the oldest wine region in the world, and it has been a UNESCO world heritage zone since 2001.

Reds, whites, and rosés are all produced in the Douro, however it is the red wines made from Touriga Nacional, Touriga Franca, Tinta Roriz (Aragonez), Tinta Barroca, and Tinto Cão, which are really the ones worth searching for. White wine is normally made from grapes such as Malvasia Fina, Viosinho, Gouveio, and Rabigato.

The red wine we have chosen is **2018 Qunito Do Vale Dona Maria "Rufo" Tinto Douro Portugal**. Dona Maria is a newish winery venture from a very famous Port producer. When his family sold the legendary Port house, Noval, Cristiano van Zeller began this wine venture to take advantage of the new interest in table wine. He has taken advantage of his contacts not only on the vineyard and production side of things, but also the sales and distribution. A really appealing wine, juicy and fresh with red fruits, nutty tannins and a strong vibrant finish.

The last wine is from the north of Italy and one of the most famous wine regions in Italy, Piedmont. This is the home of the famous Barolo and Barbaresco regions and wines made from the very temperamental Nebbiolo grape variety. There are however several other regions and grape varieties, including Arenis in white and Barbera in the reds. The wine we have chosen is the **2020 Mauro Molino Barbera D'Alba, Piedmonte Italy**. Barbera D'Alba is a region situated around the town of Alba and the wines are made from the Barbera grape variety. Whilst they do not reach the complexity and long-lived nature of their more famous cousins, Barolo and Barbaresco, they represent excellent quality and very good value of money. Barbera d'Alba wines are known for deep colour, low tannins and high levels of acidity. When young they offer fresh flavours of cherries, blueberries and raspberries. They are relatively rich and bold with plenty of flavours, with similar characteristics to Barolo or Barbaresco. To add a little more confusion, there is also a region and wine called Barbera D'Asti, from the neighbouring Asti province and the wines are generally considered a bit more lively and 'feminine'. This Barbera d'Alba is bright and fruit-driven, revealing cherry and plum fruit matched to a round, supple profile. A touch of oak leaves an engaging spicy finish.

So, there are the last 4 wines of 2022. Quite a year of wine and a quite a year in general, starting with COVID quarantines and ending in major floods. Not sure we want that to continue, but I do wish you all a great Christmas and new year.

**Matt the Bullionaire**