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Vinoble 2018 International Wine Fair

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Report on Vinoble 2018 – The International Noble Wine Fair (Jerez, Andalucía)



Place

Vinoble is the world's premier fortified and sweet wine fair which takes place biannually in Jerez de la Frontera (Jerez), Andalucía, Spain. Given the region's unique position as the origin of arguably the world's finest fortified wine – Sherry - Jerez provides the perfect backdrop to stage this global event. The historic city is well established as a tourist destination but even more so as a centre of fine wine production within a country renowned for its wine and gastronomy. Culturally significant as the home of Carthusian horses, Flamenco, Bullfighting and Hispano-Moorish Architecture, Andalucía's melting pot of historic traditions have been influenced over millennia by different settlers and nationalities, including the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals, Visigoths, Byzantines, Jews, Romani and Muslim Moors, as well as a number of native Iberian and Christian settlers. These numerous influences have shaped the look and atmosphere of the place and have also been paramount to the development of its wines and gastronomy.

Vinoble

Vinoble began in 1998 and was born out of a necessity to distinguish and promote fortified/sweet wines whose reputation had been severely eroded. At national and international wine fairs these styles are often side-lined and looked upon as an outdated adage to the contemporary wine scene. Fortified wine is complex, both in taste and production, and often more challenging for the average wine consumer. Attempts to commercialise and simplify it in the 20th century ultimately resulted in huge sales of generic styles for a small number of producers, while distorting the overall image of these world-class wines for generations of wine consumers after.



The aim of the Vinoble fair is to highlight the diversity, as well as the cultural and gastronomic significance of these wine styles, whether they originate from Spain or elsewhere. Importantly, one of the objectives is not only to assist the continued commercial viability of these wines but to spread knowledge about the renewed focus on soil, biodiversity, sustainability and a shift in consumer taste trends. This is being reflected through the growing number of producers across Spain experimenting with lighter and fresher wines and some even producing unfortified versions of wines, traditionally reserved for fortification. The notable example being the [unfortified palomino finos](#) grown on single vineyard sites.

The fair itself is mainly situated in the stunning Alcázar de Jerez, a fortress complex originally built in the 12th century. It is situated on the tallest point of Jerez and provides a special location, utilizing the courtyards, gardens and the internal palace as spaces for the more than 50 exhibitors who showcase their wines over three days.



Ethos

Vinoble recognises the uniqueness of fortified wines whose production methods are suffused with history and culture as well as being linked with specific climates and environments. In an increasingly globalised world, wine has often fallen prey to the homogenised tastes of branding and big business. Although this has brought wine to a larger audience it has also precipitated the disconnect with viticulture, local practices, language, traditional and indigenous grape varieties, place of origin and genuine world heritage.

Extra Tasting Workshops and Events

In addition to the many stalls open to visitors over the three days, a large number of excellent tasting events, discussions and workshops also took place. Booking for these additional events took place in advance online and was essential as they proved very popular and events were limited in number per attendee.

(The following tasting programme list is taken from Vinoble website www.vinoble.org)

Vinoble 2018 Official Tasting Programme

Sunday 3rd June

- 11.00 Vinoble 2018 inaugural Tasting (La Mezquita). A tasting of a selection of Grands Crus Classés from Sauternes led by Françoise Passage, Spanish importer of FAP Grand Cru.
- 12.00 The rebirth of Italian Sweet Wines (Molino de Aceite). Juancho Asenjo, one of the most influential educators in the Spanish viti-vinicultural panorama will be getting to the bottom of the complexities of the sweet wines of Italy with examples from various different regions.
- 13.00 New Winemaking Processes in Montilla-Moriles (Mezquita). The well-known oenologist from Córdoba, Miguel Cruz will explain the new vinification techniques which are being used in this important Denominación de Origen.
- 18.00 The Treasures of San Ginés (Mezquita). Beltrán Domecq and César Saldaña will present some of the vintage Sherries made from the foot trodden musts produced at the Fiesta de la Vendimia or harvest festival in Jerez each year and looked after at the Consejo Regulador's own bodega San Ginés.
- 19.00 Alicante: A Jewel Shining with Light and History (Molino de Aceite). The Fondillón wines of the DO Alicante will be presented by Pedro Ballesteros Master of

Wine, nominated “Personality of the Year 2018” in the wine sector at the XI edition of the Wine Up Guide awards.

- 20.00 The Pedro Ximénez of Jerez (Mezquita). José Antonio Zarzana, director and proprietor of Bodegas Ximénez Spínola will present his varietal wines with varying levels of evolution in bottle.

Monday 4th June

- 10.30 Liquid Relics (Mezquita). Antonio Flores, oenologist and master blender at González Byass will present a selection of exceptional wines from the Reserve Soleras at this historic Jerez bodega.
- 11.00 Blessed Oxidation (Molino de Aceite). This comparative tasting of Sherries, Champagnes and Cavas with oxidative ageing will be led by the famous Catalan bodega Gramona.
- 12.30 Sherry and Rock (Mezquita). A unique experience combining the best rock music with the “Rare Sherries” range from Bodegas Osborne. Iván Yanza will demonstrate how to marry music with wine.
- 18.00 History of a Solera (Mezquita). Montilla-Moriles wines from the soleras of Bodegas Alvear and Pérez Barquero feature in a tasting led by the oenologists from both bodegas: Bernardo Lucena and Juan Márquez.
- 19.00 Fortified Wines from Portugal (Molino de Aceite). Villa Oeiras Superior (Carcavelos), White Ports and Madeiras will be presented by Amanda Navarro, sommelier and taster on the Official Tasting Panel of Valencia.
- 20.00 From Lower Miraflores to Upper Macharnudo (Mezquita). Eduardo Ojeda and Jesús Barquín, founders of Equipo Navazos, will examine the Sherry, Manzanilla and other wines which come from these historic vineyards in the Sherry area.



From Lower Miraflores to Upper Macharnudo (Mezquita) – discussion and tasting with the founders of Equipo Navazos.

Tuesday 5th June

- 10.30 A Walk through the Albarizas and Vineyards of the Sherry Area (Mezquita). An examination of the vineyards and soils by Ramiro Ibáñez and Willy Pérez, young winemakers and drivers of a silent revolution in the Sherry area which seeks to recuperate the winemaking of the past using the knowledge and experience of the present.
- 11.00 Liquid Harmonies (Molino de Aceite). The Alicante sweet wines of Felipe Gutiérrez de la Vega presented by their proprietor, creator of the legendary Casta Diva.
- 12.00 The Miracle of Ice Wine (Mezquita). Naiara López Tejedor, commercial director of Vinos Perea will explain the majesty of ice wines and ciders from various production areas around the world.
- 18.00 The Flagship Atlantic Wines of Portugal (Mezquita). Port, Madeira and Setúbal will be presented by Cristina Tierno, director of Efecto Directo, and Ricardo Paulo, manager of LUSITNO, a shop selling the wines and gourmet products of Portugal.

- 19.00 Sweet Bordeaux (Molino de Aceite). A talk and tasting of wines from various producers who are members of the Union des Grands Vins Liqueux de Bordeaux.
- 20.00 Closing Tasting of Vinoble 2018 (Mezquita). Luís Flor, Director General of Vinoble, will present a selection of Fortified and sweet wines from the various production areas present at Vinoble 2018, and various oenologists will also participate.

An overview of 2018

This year's event was a success and blessed with beautiful weather. Temperatures were in the mid-20s and the ocean breezes kept everyone revived and comfortable. Although things got off to a quiet start, numbers picked up during the first afternoon and into day two and three. Registration was fairly straightforward, though there were queues for the masterclasses, and many were over-subscribed. The main arenas were fitted out with stalls with some outside in the courtyard under awnings.

As expected Jerez y Manzanilla was well represented, although some standout bodegas were notably absent. In some cases however their wines were still shown by the Consejo at various mixed stalls. Montilla-Moriles, Malaga, Condado de Huelva, Alicante and other Spanish regions were also well represented. Aside from Spain, some obvious locations were poorly represented. Classic sweet wine regions, such as Bordeaux, Alsace, Mosel and Tokaj were underwhelming in their range as was Vin-Doux-Naturel, Marsala, Madeira and Port, although there was small representations of most. The reasons for this could be many and speculating is likely unhelpful. What is sure is that larger and better-funded/known fairs attract more attention. Producers have a yearly budget - in some cases, it may be very small or even non-existent - to attend fairs and promote their wines. They choose one or a few that they can manage to attend. Naturally the larger well established wine fairs such as Prowein and Vin Italy are a big draw due to their sheer size and number of attendees. If the organisers of a fair charge the producer to exhibit, this adds a further cost to the travel and of exhibiting wines. Naturally, wine fairs need capital to run, so charging producers to exhibit is one of the ways this is attained. It is doubtful that any fair could operate on grants and paid advertising alone. However, the sales of sweet and fortified wines have suffered greatly in recent years and paying for a stand at a wine fair is arguably not worth it for many smaller producers with the kickback for having attended often negligible.

Consumer knowledge today is led mainly by a strong supermarket presence and the generic branding of about [ten leading grape varieties](#), of which little attention is given to the

fortified/sweet sector. The restaurant and independent retail sectors are where interesting wine (of all categories) finds a home, though this sector needs to be nurtured by enthusiastic sommeliers and wine professionals. Vinoble could find renewed focus and attention by appealing more to this sector of the market.



Some of the many interesting wines both fortified and non at the Territorio Albariza stall.

Spain is the third largest wine producing country in the world with a strong reputation for quality but is in a transitional phase regarding the style and image of its wines. For decades it has pushed a certain agenda about style, image and taste – richness, oak, alcohol – which has culminated in a kind of hegemonic sameness in many of the regions. It is positive to see that this is changing, though it takes time.

The highlight of Vinoble 2018 was undoubtedly the section called ‘Territorio Albariza’, which embodied exactly this kind of change. The stalls, located outside in the main courtyard area, were comprised of seven producers, whose collective paradigm was to show the quality of specific sites and the range of albariza soils in the extended area. They have formed a group, [Manifesto 119](#), whose interests lie in promoting indigenous grapes and making interesting wines from them. Bodegas Cota 45, run by Ramiro Ibáñez, and Bodegas Luis Pérez, run by Willy Pérez, stood out as particular examples of how local indigenous grapes can have a wide expressive range of styles. The interest in these wines, and enthusiasm towards the people making them was clear, as this was the busiest area during the three days.

The journey to understanding terroir is not a straightforward one and appears to be ever evolving. What one camp says one year, may differ slightly the next year. And this is okay as long as we (consumers, producers and critics) avoid being hemmed in by the parameters of the

current market and constraints of Consejo's or other governing bodies within wine. Experimentation is just that, an experiment, and sometimes it doesn't work, but often it does. Fortunately, new vintages and rare releases give us a kind of longitudinal study of a winemaker's evolution and how they are adapting (or not) to external market forces and trends. The better ones offer reliability combined with exciting variability. It is perhaps a willingness to embrace some exciting new trends in wine that will help Vinoble to further distinguish itself as a fair worth making the trip for. Personally, if the Territorio Albariza section had not been present at Vinoble 2018 (along with a handful of other excellent sections and some masterclasses) the fair itself would have been somewhat ordinary. Thankfully this was not the case and the overall event was both interesting and educational. Although the attendance figure for 2018 was over 7000 people, Jerez council is looking at expanding the number of stalls available to exhibitors in a bid to expand the fair. One hopes that the expansion is more about quality and diversity rather than only quantity.



Jerez is jam-packed with great cafes, wine bars and restaurants, as is nearby Sanlucar, El Puerto and even Cadiz. The seafood, if you choose your destinations carefully, is second to none. For wine lovers, there are brilliant choices and excellent bodega tours to be had. During Vinoble, there were some off-site events happening too. Bodegas Tradicion held a special evening centred on quality cooking matched with their wines, whereas other bodegas held tapas



evenings, fiestas and food events combined with sherry, flamenco, music and cultural heritage. As with most events of this nature, networking plays a large part of meeting a likeminded community, increasing ones knowledge and sharing great meals and rare wines with experts and enthusiasts alike.

Vinoble will run again in 2020.

