

## IBERIAN INFLUENCERS

The popularity and relationship of Spanish wines in the US is a unique one. The country's flagship wines of Rioja can range from world class wine list gems, to Trader Joes budget staples. That simply doesn't exist for Barolo or Burgundy (sad to say.) But all in all, Spain has long felt reasonably easy to understand to the casual wine lover; Versatile Tempranillo, dependable Albariño, and truck loads of cheap, delicious Cava. Nowadays, there also is more deserved recognition for the range of great Grenache (Garnacha) and Mourvedre (Monastrell/Mataro) made predominantly in Jumilla and Catalunya, though many first associate those two Grapes with France's Rhone Valley.

Although we do see those grapes here as well, they remain very underrepresented and Mataro especially is very seldom given it's due respect on center stage. It's difficult to grasp how Cabernet and Merlot have such a stronghold here in California, but somehow Tempranillo is virtually non-existent. Albariño could not be any more of a darling with wild popularity in the US, in both restaurants and in shops, inexplicably with no more than a handful of people taking a chance to grow and produce it domestically. These are not obscure grapes by any means, and we're sure thankful for these three producers dedicated to producing fabulous examples in their uniquely Californian style.

- Kevin Wardell, October 2020

## WINE NO.1

Ferdinand

Albariño

Vista Luna Vineyard, Napa, California 2019

RE-ORDER: \$23

### GRAPE: ALBARIÑO

America's long held stubbornness with white wines becomes magnified when we speak about a grape like Albariño. There are so many things to love about it, and yet... Why are there not more people planting the grape here and making these wines? In an ideal world, cooler sites similar to its native home in Rias Baixas may provide more optimum results for the variety, but Albariño has proven its versatility and could thrive in several places up and down the California coast. Sure, the upstream movement towards more crisp and mineral driven domestic whites has certainly made headway in recent years, but there is zero reason in our mind that at least 7/10 Sauvignon Blanc growers shouldn't at least be considering making the switch to something as delightful as Albariño.

**WINEMAKER:** Evan Frazier started his winemaking career / addiction in the south of France. He has been a longtime part of the Kongsgaard team here in California and started his own label, Ferdinand, in 2011 with just one wine: an Albariño. Evan has long had a fascination with wines from Spain- from Tempranillo and Garnacha to Graciano and Mazuelo (Carignan), which he also makes. But although there are other delightful examples of white wine from Spain, the Albariños from the Northwest region of Rias Baixas are truly the best the country has to offer. Evan has followed these wines closely and been inspired by them over the years and has truly done them great justice here in the US. Ferdinand is really the benchmark Albariño in California, so he, in turn, has now become the inspiration for others looking to unlock similar results from the grape. His winemaking is simple and low intervention, never inoculating, adding acid, enzymes or sugar, with judicious use of oak and minimal sulphur.

**GLASS:** Carmen Miranda in flip flops enjoying a springtime float down a rambling river. Fresh sliced pineapple and tart green apple as well as a classic tropical fruit cup. Jasmine and orange blossoms with slightly bitter citrus zest and a touch of mineral saltiness. Well made Albariño has such a wonderful capacity to ride the line between tropicality and freshness and this is a prime example of exactly that. As buttoned up as it is as a crowd pleaser, as linear as it is ripe. Not as steely as Spanish examples as the fruit is ripened in the Napa sun, after all, but there is thankfully little else here that would remind you of most other whites from the same spot. Evan made only 831 cases of this wine and we can think up about 832 reasons to drink it.

## WINE NO.2

Enfield 'Pretty Horses'

90% Tempranillo + 5% Graciano + Pinot Noir

Sierra Foothills, California 2017

RE-ORDER: \$33

### GRAPE: TEMPRANILLO

Clearly the most important grape on the Iberian Peninsula with a history dating back 3000 years to the arrival of the Phoenicians. Rioja is the most recognized appellation name world wide, though there are many others equally worthy of learning about- an example would be what Chianti is to Sangiovese in Italy. Anchor grapes such as Sangiovese, Tempranillo and Cabernet Sauvignon have some important similarities that make them so distinct. For one, they all are heralded for their more savory flavor profiles (e.g. leather, tobacco, vegetal) then they are for their fruitiness. Secondly, they have all proved to be stallworth varieties in the face of time. If there is one thing that has sustained the stardom of the top grapes and that is whether they can age well or not.

WINEMAKERS: John Lockwood and Amy Seese have been fully committed to Enfield since 2013. John jumped from being a Luthier to winemaking and certainly has had some regal exposure to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay working at both Littorai and Faila along the way. And although Enfield may be predominantly known for those varieties, John has long had his eye on the potential of Tempranillo here in California. The 'Pretty Horses' Tempranillo is a blend of 2 vineyards - Rorick Heritage Vineyard (60%) and Shake Ridge Ranch (35%). High up in the Sierras, Shake Ridge is a highly regarded, if not famous, California vineyard for its cool high-altitude nights, sublime rocky soils, and of course, impeccable farming. This blend showcases a bit more of a bright example of Tempranillo than John's single vineyard bottling from Shake Ridge, which is an elegant powerhouse.

GLASS: The nose is an impressive archetypal Tempranillo wine. A touch of the famous dusty leather from Rioja. but also shines right up there with the more polished wines from Ribero de Duero. Red fruit, very red, concentrated, and intensely perfumed. But intertwined there is umami- think dried nori snacks- and rich earthy notes- think fresh tobacco. The fruit translates on the palate to be more surprisingly crunchy, like smaller tart plums and rainier cherries, than it is viscous. It's complemented by, and further complicated, with a twist up of both black and red licorice. Is that a thing? Tannins are firm and are best presented after some air and/or with something grilled, like some calamari steaks.

### WINE NO.3

Fine Disregard

Mataro

Pato Vineyard, Contra Costa, California 2017

RE-ORDER: \$33

**GRAPE:** MATARO (aka Monastrell / Mourvèdre)

Is it truly a grape doomed to be known only as the M in GSM? Referring, of course, to the classic blend of Grenache, Syrah and Mourvèdre that has now been pigeonholed by a catchy nickname (darn you Aussies.) Thankfully, Spain has a solid number of single varietal examples, be they named Mataro or Monastrell, that have more than proved the grapes' value on its own merits. Wines from the Jumilla region specifically have only been recognized for their high quality wines since the mid nineties, and for those paying close attention, they are now considered some of their favorites in all Spain. Mataro does have a solid history here in the US, but, just like in Europe, has been mostly overlooked. Maybe the connection to Grenache and Syrah helps with some name recognition so that producers savvy enough to make a varietal Mataro or Mourvèdre don't have too far to reach when explaining just how great a grape it is.

**WINEMAKER:** Fine Disregard Wine Co. is the combination of Mike Schieffer and Kara Maraden, both of which pride themselves on making sure their wines do all the work. Meaning that they make Fine Disregard wines by letting the grapes express themselves, subscribing to 'minimal manipulation' but also clean winemaking. They also strive to create California wines from grapes like Mataro and Semillon: they avoid making decisions in the vineyards or in the winery with hopes to mimic Old World wines from very different climates and terroir. The Mataro is sourced from vines that are over 100 years old, yes, here in California, and they have plenty to express on their own. Here's to more Fine Disregard!

**GLASS:** As confusing as the name of the grape has proven, there is no mistaking that this wine carries of the deep fruit intensity more in common with the varietal wines of Spain than those of Southern France. Bubbling with Boysenberry and a briar of blackberries on the nose, with a dusting of dark cocoa powder. The dark and bitter side of the chocolate spectrum is vital here in the mouthfeel in order to balance out the fruit, and lay the foundation for the whole second dimension to this wine. A layer of bitter grilled herbs and peppercorns on the outside of a steak is a great underlying compliment to the deep and ripe fruit. Grippy with texture and the tannins, although very well integrated, are simply not messing around. Treat yourself and make a deliciously rich duck cassoulet on a cool autumn night. Drink this with that. Ready? Duck. Go.