

Vignerons – El Magazine de Bodeboca

Published January 16, 2017

Source - <http://www.bodeboca.com/blog/entrevista-a-jorge-ordonez/>

“Interview of Jorge Ordóñez”

Relocated to the United States, this *malagueño* has been or is behind the most interesting winemaking projects in our panorama. The thousands of miles he accumulates on his trips are directly related to the number of Spanish wines that carry his signature. He has given us a few moments of his time from to discuss his most personal opinions of the wine world, while he decides the *coupage* for his Albariño La Caña. His Botani 2015 is one of 2016’s Top 3 Value Wines according to Robert Parker.

You have been named Wine Personality of the Year on two occasions in the United States. Are North Americans the most conscious of the value our wines represent?

It’s important to understand the American market as each market is different. For example, the English and German markets have been traditionally oriented towards price, with the typical offers in supermarket chains focused on pricing. The American market was created differently. A small group of importers began our careers based on trying to lock down the highest quality producers in Spain. Since in the beginning quality wines were introduced, the American consumer’s perception was positive from the first moment. **Surely the United States is the country that has the best public image of our wines.** - JO

If you could choose one phrase to describe your wines, what would it be?

I like to make serious wines. I’m referring to honest, varietally focused wines. Our work is non-interventionist; we focus on traditional winemaking with the advantage of modern technology. We work with head-trained bush vines, on mountainsides, that are very old, and are very low yielding and dry farmed. - JO

On occasion, media channels say that you are intimidating. What do you think that is from?

I am uncompromising, I say what I think, and as I am almost 60 years old, if I am not going to say it now, when will I? The truth is that I am extremely demanding – both with my own wineries and those that want to work with me. I have to compete with French wine, with German white wine, with Italian red wine, and that requires a lot of serious effort.

It’s the same thing with chefs, they are very temperamental. Wine is like cooking, you have to be very demanding if you are going to compete in international markets, and in my opinion, the average Spanish consumer demands very little from Spanish wine. - JO

If you were not dedicated to this, what would you do?

I would be a chef because I am obsessed with cooking – I will prepare you just as easily a *foie gras demi-cuit* or a lobster lasagna with truffles or a classic *gazpachuelo*. I also love fishing. **I was born in Málaga and I need to see a body of water around me, even if it is a river.** Fortunately, I have lived the majority of my life overlooking either a river or an ocean and I would not change that for anything. - JO

What do you think of points and lists (wine rankings)?

In such a confusing world like wine where there are so many brands - for example, in the United States one distributor might carry 5,000 different SKUs – you have to guide the consumer to what are “in theory” the good wines. The critics have a greater perspective of the market; that being said, wine writing is inherently subjective, as each critic has their own tastes. Their opinions help.

It seems like nowadays people have to sign up for a wine tasting course to know what they are drinking and I think critics are important. If you (the consumer) do not like one critic you can follow another one, it is an open market. I’m not saying you have to buy a wine if it scores well, but serious critics have a mission to complete.

Wine is for enjoyment, and regardless of the huge amount of elitism that we assign to it, it is a product for consumption. Obviously it is far more complex than any other drink, but at the end of the day it is a matter of tastes. On the other side, you have to realize that critics judge and form opinions on what you put in front of them, and not one of them is Sherlock Holmes. **It’s also important to recognize that points are dependent on how serious the producer is.** - JO

What wine do you have the most affection for?

Personally, as I am obsessed with cooking and I believe that wine is a part of cooking and cuisine, I go through phases. **If I like a wine, I drink it obsessively.** Eventually I will get tired of it and move to another.

It is true that there are certain projects that I fall more in love with. I will explain it with this example: when you achieve what you wanted to achieve, you do not lose desire, you try to refine it. But when you have not achieved it, you double down on your efforts and when you finally do achieve it, you experience a moment of happiness. I like to make wines in all parts of Spain. **I’ve always said that the day I get bored I will retire, and frankly, I am not bored.** I believe that it is important to always have that flame, emotion, and desire to continue. Our companies’ spirit is one of always overcoming – every time we make a good wine we ask “How can we make it better next year?” We are very good at self-evaluating, which is what makes a company survive and grow. - JO

What is the wine you've always wanted to make and still haven't been able to?

I have them in barrel and they are almost ready! I can tell you that one is a Tempranillo and one is a Garnacha.

Indigenous varieties, correct?

For six years I was the only importer of Albariño into the United States, when no one gave a crap about that variety. Sometimes these efforts are considered lost causes, but I believe that is an incorrect term. **The lack of understanding of Spanish wine growing history is the problem.** I have always been very nationalist when it comes to exporting wine because what truly differentiates us is our indigenous grapes. There are thousands of well made Cabernets, but I always prefer to defend the authenticity and rarity of Spanish varieties. **There is no reason to drink bad wine in a country like ours.** - JO

Scrupulous attention to detail with winery cleanliness and transport conditions. Where does that come from?

We produce authentic wines, but not dirty wines. The difference is small, it's a question of hygiene. We produce clean wines, based on two pillars: that they do not have problems with reduction, which is fundamental and can be analyzed. Unripe vineyards, vineyards that yield 30 times what they should yield, and careless winemaking all cause reductive aromas in wine. The second premise is that we produce wines that are bacteriologically clean – we don't want wines with *Brettanomyces*, for example. If we do produce a wine with *Brettanomyces*, the levels must be very low. We want people to smell and taste Mencía, not *Brettanomyces*. This is not to say that we sterile filter our wines – we care for the wines during the ageing process and are sure to clean our barrels.

I have spent a huge amount of money on wine analysis and I have seen all of the problems – they are on the walls, in the barrels, on the floor. **I am not a winemaker but I know a lot about winemaking problems and what can go wrong during the winemaking process.**

When I arrived to the United States I learned about refrigerated transport because we never used it in Spain. First, we decided to refrigerate the shipping containers. We found that this was not sufficient, and as a result, we were the first importer to have a refrigerated warehouse exclusively for wine in Bilbao. Even still, the wine was not arriving in good condition due to interior transport, so we started refrigerating our trucks. From March to November we have an absolutely vital refrigerated shipping system. **We add 500 digital thermometers per year to our shipments without notifying anyone to monitor our shipments.** We do everything possible to ensure that the wine is brought from the producers to the customers in the best possible conditions. - JO

Complete this phrase: The best wine is one that...

Whoever consumes that wine, that they enjoy it. 30 years ago, Spain used to consume four times more wine than it does now. We've welcomed beer and gin & tonics with open arms. Wine was pushed off the streets and on top of that, no one has considered that the consumer does not

have a lot of money to spend. Not everyone has 50 euros to spend on a bottle of wine each night to pair with their steak. Our producers have handed that market over to other, less noble alcoholic drinks. - JO

You produce great wines that are oftentimes are not over 10 euros. How?

We respect the consumer and we have integrity, which is the most important. I also don't care what the market thinks. We make accessible wines, and we do that as well as possible until the final moment. The people who work here are extremely committed to quality and my winemakers know this. - JO

The Axarquía in Málaga. Is it still the great unknown?

Absolutely. We have vineyards with 70% inclinations, without terraces, that are way older than what is planted in Ribeira Sacra and Priorat, which are much more well known. We also have an extremely ancient indigenous variety – Moscatel de Alejandría, which was introduced by the Phoenicians. It is actually the oldest Muscat clone and the most pure, as it has not been genetically crossed. These vineyards have been planted for 2,600 years and are cultivated with mule drawn plows. They are also harvested by hand with the help of mules. The phylloxera and negligence isolated the zone. Personally, I thought it was a shame that this industry just wither away. With these vines, how is it possible to produce bad wine? - JO