

# RENE E SARA

VENUS LA UNIVERSAL E MONSANTO E PRIORAT



## THE POWER COUPLE OF PRIORAT & MONSANT

BY STATION TO STATION WINE

I am sitting in the kitchen of Rene Barbier and Sara Perez in Monsant. I have innocently asked about the push for Catalan independence and Sara, starting gently and thoughtfully now Sara slams her fist down on the table and gets to her feet as she remonstrates and rails against the treatment the Spanish government. René (whom I have thus far rarely heard speak) guffaws to himself - he has heard and seen this before it seems. Sara sits down with a self deprecating, half embarrassed chuckle at how carried away she has gotten. Dido! she announces, holding up a glass. Let's taste!

Sara is petit and striking, a ball of Catalan passion and fury. Rene stands tall and burly and fits the gentle giant mould. I have spent the morning in Sara's pick up truck, rallying around the mountainous Monsant & Priorat landscape, feeling at times like a mountain goat clinging to the side of the mountain as Sara talks non stop about everything from licorella to farming to grapes to animals and natural predators and obviously, wine. Rene has spent this time slowly but deliberately gliding around the kitchen in their house/winery in Falset, preparing us a slap up feed. It is easy to see how this dichotomy manifests itself as a positive in the phenomenal wine they make.

We eventually charge into the kitchen and Sara manages to find a few glasses and some wine with a crash bang and wallop while Rene smoothly and efficiently lays out a ginormous and delicious spread. We sit.

## The Priorat 5 & the circle of life

Rene's father, Rene Barbier Snr, along with Sara's father Jorg Perez, along with Alvaro Palacios and a few others were the original hippies & dreamers that took Priorat from being a burnt out husk of a region in the late 80's, to the top of the Spanish wine classification in just a few short years. The group made one wine between them for the first vintage (though bottled it across their 5 newly established labels - leading to different scores from the critics much to their amusement!). Barbier's label was Clos Mogador, Perez's label was Mas Martinet. Both wineries remain at the top of the family tree in Priorat. Rene e Sara cut their teeth in these wineries and learned how to make wine, eventually taking over the wine making duties as profound wine makers in their own right, bringing their own ideas and philosophies to the production.



The two also fell in love and married. As a testament to their skill they had already established their own projects before they married. Sara had started La Universal in the Monsant, while Rene had established Partida del Pedrer in Priorat. They both became equal partners in each other's project and officially became a winemaking team and a dynasty.

In 2003 Rene e Sara established a restaurant called Les Irreductibles. The restaurant is still a vital part of the landscape and you might just find Alvaro Palacios at an adjacent table holding court. It is now housed in the Les Figueres winery owned by another industry veteran and legend, Christopher Cannan. It is worth noting that Rene was consulting for this winery at the time, now an established force in the region. Sara was consulting for Valencia's Celler del Roure, now one of Spain's most important wineries. Rene e Sara were and are the original wine power couple. It is unlikely a more significant pairing will ever emerge.



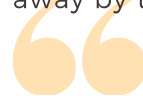
*Rene e Sara were and are the original wine power couple. It is unlikely a more significant pairing will ever emerge.*

# Venus La Universal Sustainability

A few years ago now, René and I decided to get into this world in order to leave an emotional not material footprint behind us. In this sense, we decided that we only needed to use the bare essentials, materials which had lower energy costs during their lifetime. This has led to constant research for the traceability of everything we buy and a daily challenge of the needs of its use. The trail of waste and energy burden associated with a bottle of wine can be very big or very small depending on how we work. This trail starts right at the time of planting and continues right the way through to distribution of a bottle of wine to the final consumer. In general, we have analyzed the inputs and outputs of our agricultural system transformation processes. We realized that if we recycle our outputs and transform them into inputs, we are in effect closing the circle and helping other neighbouring livestock systems to do the same, thus creating a stable social and economic network. So what have we done over the last few years to make our project sustainable? This can be seen **in the vineyard**, in the **winery** and in **logistics**.



1) **In the vineyard**, by using organic farming methods, we drastically decreased our waste products and the energy costs associated to the use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilizers. The organic matter we use as fertilizer is a recycled waste product, cow and horse manure, which is used together with vine trimmings and pomace from our grapes. As “pesticides” we use goat’s milk whey, thus recycling another polluting by product as well as using plant extracts in order to totally eliminate the use of sulphur powder (permitted by organic farming regulations, but derived from petroleum). Our fossil fuel consumption has gone down and we have replaced the use of a heavy tractor for that of a lighter quad bike (less fuel consumption). With the quad, we do not compact the soil as much, keeping the structure of the soil in better conditions. Grapes are our only final product made in our agricultural system. The leaves from the vines fall onto the soil and decompose completely if we leave plant cover (on bare earth, these leaves are blown away by the wind).



*René and I decided to get into this world in order to leave an emotional not material footprint behind us.*

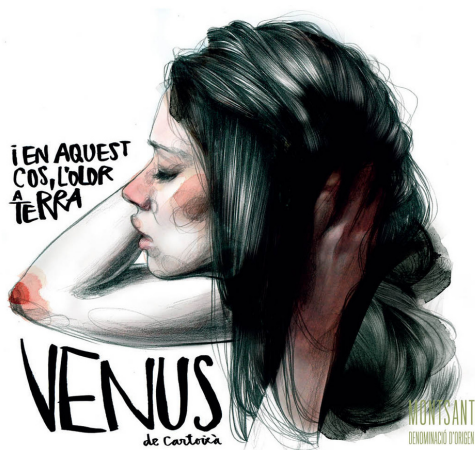


# Venus La Universal Sustainability Cont.

**2) At the winery,** we have chosen to work with wild yeasts, the ones already on the grapes, with lactic bacteria which are present in large quantities in the wind and acids which are naturally occurring in the grapes. The only inputs we have are sulphites and year after year, we are carrying out experiments to reduce the addition of these until we get down to zero additions. We improved our water management systems by cleaning with a steamer (reducing by 89% the quantity of water used in the winery). We are still dependent on the mains electric supply for our energy consumption, but this will be the next step: investing in solar energy.

**3) Logistics.** This starts from the choice of bottle to the final distribution of our wine and where we use most energy. Step by step, we are analyzing our energy contributions for the different elements: capsules, bottles, corks and transport. In the case of Dido, the spotlight were on capsules: be them of tin, aluminium or complex, the associated industry is highly polluting and with high hidden costs. It seems that organic waxes have lower associated energy costs, so we decided to change our capsules for wax.

Glass bottle weight is also another important point to take into account (linked to fuel costs during transport). In the case of Dido, there are some models with acceptable weights, but in the case of Venus, this is a difficult subject as the shape and colour of the bottle are important elements in the aesthetics of this wine (at least right now).



Encomandador VENUS LA UNIVERSAL, S.L.  
RUE 28120 LLODRIO, ESPANA, Product of Spain  
2011 15% VOL. 750 ml

In terms of cardboard boxes we have moved to recycled paper boxes. The texture is not as smooth, but in this way, we are not responsible for cutting down more trees to make our wines. Our corks are an important element in our wines and for the wines' ageing process. However, the use of natural cork means we continue to work the cork tree forests and promote the survival of the associated ecosystem. By buying natural corks we are helping to sustain good forestry techniques as well as supporting companies which are working towards maintaining a positive carbon footprint or who are socially implicated in the area.

And finally, the key point is transport. Maritime and rail transport methods mean costs are 5 times lower than by road.

This has made us reconsider our exports and seek out the train as a distribution media for Europe and other nearby cities. This is still in its early stages though, since this form of transport is not well developed for small, fragile loads like wine. But we will get there!

**SARA PEREZ**



*...in this way, we are not responsible for cutting down more trees to make our wines...*

# La Universal 'Dido'

## Blanc 2019

This wine was born out love, out of intuition... Faithful to our belief to recover part of our past, or our traditions, we chose to make a Mediterranean white wine using local grape varieties: Garnatxa blanca (White Grenache), Macabeu (Viura) and Cartoixà (Xarel·lo)... Voluptuousness, elegance and rectitude. Words with a capital letter. This wine reminds us of the fragrances of autumn, ripe fruit, nuts and raisins, seeds...an enchanting creamy texture with a long finish...Truly beguiling! Prepare to be seduced!

**RENE E SARA**

White Dido is a journey through the Montsant. Garnatxa comes from three different plots located in the area of Marça and Falset. The first plot is a 70-year old vineyard, the second one, 25 years old aged, with Garnatxa and Macabeu and the other two Macabeu plots, aged more than 70 years old. They are located in colder areas in the border of the DOQ Priorat, providing us structure and ageing potential. All of them are growing on a calcareous white soil. A small part of the grapes are macerated with skin during 3/5 days in open containers to make the starter (*pie de cuba*) to get native yeast. Another 20% is macerated with skin during 24h to 15 days depending on the varietal and the extraction we want to reach. The rest goes straight to the press. It is aged for 14 months initially in different volume barrels from 300l to 600l and *foudres*. The last months it is aged in concrete. **SARA**

**Macabeu**

**Garnatxa blanca**

**Cartoixà (Xarel·lo)**

Stunning example of how Spanish whites from lesser-known varieties are the future of very fine white at good prices. This has the depth and texture of a white Burgundy, but with Mediterranean character, razor sharp acidity and great tension. **STSWine**



# La Universal 'Dido'

## Rosa 2019

A wine made with different types of Garnatxa (Grey, Red and White) to add volume and density but also with Macabeu and Carinyena to provide acidity and Ull de Llebre balance alcohol. **RENE E SARA**

After pressing all the varietals at the same time, the grape most was fermented in more than ten years old barrels. The fermentation process was long and lasted 6 months. This process was then followed by 7/8 months of ageing in the same barrels. Then it goes to a big foudre of more than 50 years old of 4500l, for 10 more months.

A pale and aged rosé following the tendency of the great rosés of the world. A Mediterranean, from the South, well-structured and ageing potential wine. **SARA**

**Garnatxa negra 50%**

**Macabeu 20%**

**Ull de Llebre 15%**

**Carinyena 10%**

**Garnatxa blanca 2,5%**

**Garnatxa gris 2,5%**

This is an incredible wine. Very, very pale pink. A colour you could look at for hours. Forget what you think you know about Rose, this is made with red and white grapes, it has the spirit of a white with the character of a red. Is this the world'd first *non-binary rose*? **STSWine**



# La Universal 'Dido'

## Tinto 2019

It is our tribute to the youth, tenacity, love and Garnatxa. The wine, from the plots of Falset, exhibits a delicious fruit and grows in concrete tanks to hold an extraordinary freshness and purity. **RENE E SARA**

This wine comes from a plot of 10 hectares of degraded granite land called gravel. The sandy gravel structure and graceful texture changes temperature rapidly depending on the climate. It heats during the day and cools at night, allowing the grapes a good and long maturation. Garnatxa coming from gravel is an explosive fruit expression and turn a deep dark contrast due to day versus night temperature. We try to not take part in this term and maintain this expression. It is why we work with whole grain, medium duration of maceration, and ageing respecting fruit with clay amphora or concrete tanks. 40% of the wine aged for 16 months in different wood barrels from 300L up to 4000L and the remaining 60% in concrete tank to emphasize the fruit. **SARA**

**Garnatxa 70%**

**Sirà 20%**

**Carinyena /Merlot/Cabernet Sauvignon 10%**

This is one of my favourite Spanish wines of all time, I didn't get a chance to try the last vintage, 2019 is back with a bang. there is a lifted aromatic profile thats more prominent than ever and a buzzy energy & intensity to the wine. Such a good wine. **STSWine**



# La Universal

## 'Venus' 2017

Venus is the yearly result of our search for beauty. An attempt to understand the femininity, the land, through a bottle of wine: Carinyena, Garnatxa and Sirà. Mystery and seduction, speech and wealth, peace, patience, balance and passion.

A juicy wine, mostly created to be paired with food, especially the Mediterranean traditional cuisine. **RENE E SARA**

We work with 4 parcels of Garnatxa and Carinyena old vines located between Pinyana and Crossos. A vineyard located in the ridge with both North and South sides clay-calcareous soil, deep and wet to allow slow and long ripening. Sirà vines comes from our plot in Venus La Universal.

Grapes are harvested by plots. They are selected and processed separately, but finally we try to do the fermentation all together if the vintage allow us. Grapes are processed as whole berries and some stems from Garnatxa. Fermentation starts with wild native yeast. We apply slightly pigeage during fermentation and maceration, that takes around 21 and 28 days in wood tanks. Venus is aged in a 4500l wood vat for 6 months and 12 more months in 2500l foudres. **SARA**

**Garnatxa 60%**  
**Carinyena 40%**

This is Montsant, but also feels like Priorat. This is Rene e Sara's flagship wine and it bears their signature emphatically, truly a collectors wine, this could do with another couple of years in the bottle before drinking, we tried a 2005 the other day that was fresh as a daisy - it's a matter of how long you can resist - it'll keep getting better. **STSWine**

