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Written by

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Cortijo los Aguilares Pinot Noir 2015 Sierras de Málaga

WINES OF THE WEEK

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This was my find of the recent London Wine Fair, although before tasting this gem I was intrigued by a couple of wines from Ecuador, a Chardonnay and a Cabernet/Malbec blend that did taste vaguely of those varieties, the produce of two harvests a year and made by Vinos Dos Hemisferios. It seemed so unlikely to be producing wine on the equator that, sceptical as ever, I asked to see pictures of the vineyards.

They certainly looked well kept. I was told that a few years ago they had to decide either to cease production or expand. They chose the latter and planted a second vineyard.

The extensive (800-hectare/1,977-acre) Cortijo los Aguilares estate is just 5 km outside the extraordinary and beautiful hilltop town of Ronda (pictured) in the hills above Marbella. It was established in 1999 by José Antonio and Victoria Itarte, who planted their 19 hectares (47 acres) of vineyard with three red bordeaux varieties and three hectares of Pinot Noir. It seems, unexpectedly almost, as though the red burgundy grape has been most successful – helped perhaps by the fact that they blend the produce of an early and a later harvest. This is a technique that has been employed with some success by Sauvignon Blanc producers, first in New Zealand and then in Chile. I've never heard of it being used for Pinot Noir anywhere else but in this case it seems to work.

I see Ferran liked the 2013 in his report on [Málaga beyond the beaches](#) a couple of years ago, pointing out some admiration for winemaker Bibi Garcia. Viticulture is wholesome (I don't expect they get too much rain here) and presumably the elevation of 900 m (2,953 ft) keeps nights and grape flavours fresh. Once the grapes are picked, they are given a bit of a cold soak before careful temperature-controlled fermentation. Malolactic conversion takes place in large 300- and 500-litre oak casks, followed by eight months in top-quality French oak, which is imperceptible in the wine.

I really enjoyed the floral nose, sweet, round, fresh, very frank fruit and the sensation of berries that somehow taste wild. The alcohol level is a modest 13.5%, the same as a host of red burgundies, but this wine has its own character. I don't think it will fall apart rapidly but I don't see any point in ageing it when it is such a charmer already – without notable tannins but with good acidity. And as you can see below, the packaging is really very smart indeed.



This is much better than the average cheap varietal Pinot. Every year there is an international competition in Switzerland for Pinot Noirs made all over the world. The owners are extremely proud that this one from Spain's deep south was awarded a gold medal in 2010 and a 'great gold medal' in 2008.

The estate has a smart website and an [online sales facility](#) but unfortunately, and perhaps understandably, this particular wine is sold out. [Georges Barbier](#) (cousins of [René Barbier of Priorat](#)) import it into the UK and will sell it at the wholesale price of £18.70 plus VAT direct to consumers who should call 020 885 25801 to place an order. They will even sell by the single bottle. According to wine-searcher.com, it is widely available in Spain and also in Germany (best price), Belgium and Austria.

This is not the first Andalucían Pinot to have caught our attention. See Nick's note in [New York, new openings](#) on Barranco Oscuro, El Pino Rojo 2011, a potent but well-balanced, sulphur-free Pinot Noir from a little Andalucían vineyard near Granada at nearly 1,400 m (4,500 ft) elevation. We enjoyed it last October, at \$78 a bottle, at

(4,590 ft) elevation. We enjoyed it last October, at \$78 a bottle, at Gramercy Tavern, whose wine list is always instructive.

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