



DIRECT PRESS

MARCH 2022

GARNACHA

IN THREE COLORS

For a grape that is one of the most

widely-planted in the world, you'd think Garnacha (aka Grenache) would get a little more respect than it does. I admit I don't always think of Garnacha in the same league as Pinot Noir or Nebbiolo; but I'm not sure why. One reason may be that it's typically blended with other grapes. Syrah and Mourvèdre are its most well-known companions, teaming up to make familiar 'GSM' blends. Unlike Pinot Noir, which is difficult to grow cheaply, Grenache makes some of the best



cheap wines around; but it's not appreciated nearly enough for this gift to us all. Like anything that gets taken for granted, Garnacha deserves more attention. After last month's theme on field blends, it made sense to do the opposite and focus on just one grape this month. And what better than to highlight a grape that is literally right under our noses all the time but doesn't get its proper due?

If you're wondering why I'm favoring the Spanish *Garnacha* instead of the French *Grenache*, it's because current scholarship points to the grape's Spanish origins. With its natural defenses against powdery mildew, it became a worldwide success, migrating first from the north of Spain into France. It most famously thrived in the southern Rhône, where it is the dominant grape in most basic wines from the Côtes du Rhône, but also in

Châteauneuf-du-Pape, the region's most revered appellation.

Still, it seems to live in the shadow of Syrah, which reigns over the top appellations of the northern Rhône with a regal fealty Grenache just a few miles south can't command. Yet when Burgundy had tough vintages before World War I it was Grenache that secretly got added to the wines to make them fuller, not Syrah. In Australia, Grenache was the most important

When I first started getting into wine, I remember the shift from \$11 Malbec to \$12 Côtes du Rhône being transformative. For almost the same price, I felt like I had gained so much complexity without sacrificing any fruit, body, or certainly, alcohol. I felt like I had discovered a secret. When I started tasting professionally, it was the Grenache-heavy southern Rhône wines that seemed superior to me, far more forward, spicy, and gregarious



grape for a while — until Shiraz (Aussie Syrah) swaggered in and took control in the 1960s. In California, it's far more common to see a 100% Syrah than 100% Grenache. Even in Spain, Garnacha's ancestral homeland, Tempranillo is seen as the superior grape variety. Maybe Garnacha is just the middle-child of the wine grape world, happy to blend in and tag along, never demanding enough attention.

than their brooding, black olive-y northern Rhône foils. I was told the Syrah-based wines were better, so I assumed I like Grenache due to my as-yet undeveloped palate.

It's nice to know that I often still prefer Grenache to Syrah. Now I'm just not self-conscious about it. But it does reinforce to me this entrenched idea of Grenache being less

special, less pedigreed. Does it compete with Barolo or Bordeaux for collectability? Maybe not. I recently had a very well-stored 1995 Châteauneuf-du-Pape from Château de Beaucastel, one of the most legendary producers in the region. It was no match for Gruaud-Larose or Bartolo Mascarello of similar age that were also opened that evening. But it's an insane comparison. Why were we even opening such rare wines all at the same time that nobody could even finish? Other than sheer hedonism, there is no reason. Not that it wasn't fun; but maybe contrived comparisons like these point to why Garnacha remains so underappreciated despite the immense role it has to play in our lives outside of the decadent throwdowns of indulgent wine snobs.

As a grape so well-suited to hot, dry climates, Garnacha is not going the way of the dodo anytime soon. We are lucky to have a grape that over the centuries has produced good wines — more reliably than almost any other variety — through pestilence, wars, and climate destruction. In France, it's the second most-planted grape after Merlot. With Merlot, the highs are exquisite but the lows can be pretty crappy. With Grenache, the lows are maybe the best bang-for-your-buck that exists. The highs are good enough to make some of the most exceptional wines I might drink in a year, like the Gramenon Sagesse (Press 2); though maybe not in a lifetime. I'm ok with that.

We've assembled a lineup of wines that show a range of delicious Garnachas in different colors: red, white, orange, and grey (Grenache Gris). This is a grape that loves being blended with others, especially the non-red versions which are lower in acidity. It is pretty rare to find 100% Garnacha Blanca outside of Catalonia, so this month there are less white wines than normal, as we picked some red/white co-ferments in order to stick with the 100% Garnacha theme.

Does Garnacha require isolation to make it more revered and respected? I certainly have a better sense of its limitations and strengths after auditioning only 100% Garnacha this month. However, if our dive into field blends taught us anything, it's that reliance on one variety is a slippery slope in a changing climate. Garnacha may never get the respect of a grape that shines brightest on its own. Its strength is in its versatility, in its unpretentious ability to play so well with other grapes to make the sum greater than its parts. I like the humble humanity of Garnacha, the fact that it can work on its own, as the wines this month clearly show, but it is almost always happier with a little help from its friends.

Cheers!

[Jonathan](#) and [Kirk](#)

Photos: *Joan Ferré of Celler Frisach in Terra Alta, a region in Catalan Spain where all three color variations of Garnacha (locally spelled Garnatxa) are found.*

PHOTOS: [PARIS WINE COMPANY](#)

DIRECT PRESS • MARCH 2022 • GARNACHA

Celler Frisach “l’Abrunet” Blanc 2020

Terra Alta • Catalonia • Spain

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

In Terra Alta, in Catalan Spain, Garnatxa Blanca (as it’s spelled in Catalan) is the most important grape. This wine from brothers Francesc and Joan Ferré gives some clue as to why Garnatxa Blanca holds so much importance there. It’s not typical to see Garnatxa Blanca vinified by itself because it is lower in acidity, but the Ferré brothers do an early pick to get grapes with more acidity, and then a later pick of the same vines when the grapes are fully ripe. The rest is pretty hands-off, with 14 hours of skin contact (it’s not an orange wine, however) and 6 months in steel tank, with just a small sulfur addition. Their method is simple but the results show Garnatxa Blanca in all its sumptuous glory. Juicy pear notes, lemon sponge cake, and grassy nectarine. There is buttercream, bergamot, and a little mineral texture on the palate. It’s crazy delicious, gulpable, and irresistible. I know it’s a 750ml bottle, but maybe don’t share this one. JK

Scotty Boy! “Guess Who’s Coming To Dinner

2020

Santa Barbara County • California • USA

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 White]

Scotty-Boy! is a project in Santa Barbara from a wine making team who spent many years making buttoned up, classic-leaning wines. With Scotty-Boy! They’re tossing that idea into the trash and basically lighting it on fire. As they put it, Scotty-Boy’s mission is “to offer wine in its purest most unadulterated form: wild, alive, mostly savage, and ready to slurp.”

Honestly, their words are so perfectly representative, I really don’t need to use many of my own here – I’d only be muting their vision. Their site is loaded with radical one-liners describing their vin de soif-style wines as being “less judgy and more chuggy” and “patio pounders.” Despite their “nothing added/nothing taken away” operative mantra, they use the expertise developed from years of operating in a more serious style. Wild, alive, savage? Yeah, totally – but with intention and finesse.

I think it’s worth underlining “alive” a couple dozen times for this 2020 Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner. 65% Grenache Noir and 35% Grenache Blanc that ends up as a kind of rosé, the wine goes through full carbonic maceration and spends 18 days on the skins before press. At this point, I probably don’t need to say that there’s no added So2 here. This fizzy, hazy juice-bomb will have you dreaming of summer afternoons and dry aged burgers. Its fresh orangey nose is almost negroni-like with a lip-smacking palate of sparkling pomegranate-hibiscus tea with an orange twist. Chill it, pop it, and hang f***ing loose, dude. CC

Charlotte and Jean-Baptiste Senat “Amalgame” Minervois 2020

Languedoc • France

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Another co-ferment of Grenache Noir, Grenache Blanc, and Grenache Gris, but this one is from southern France, where these grapes are most commonly found. Charlotte Senat and husband Jean-Baptiste are rightly celebrated as natural wine pioneers in this part

of the Languedoc, starting in the late 1990s and working only with organic and Biodynamically-farmed indigenous grapes. They are using zero sulfur in the cellar. While Jean-Baptiste is happiest working in the vineyards, Charlotte runs the business side, and is famous for organizing one of the biggest fairs for natural wines in the south of France.

Despite being zero-zero, this lighter red is not too funky, just unpretentious and gulpable. There's a touch of spritz and a nice mix of rooibos tea and smoky umami on the palate, finishing with some orange and tangy cherry notes. Glou-glou but with more complexity, a category I don't tire of. Great with a slight chill. In humble fashion, the Senats declare this wine 'a perfect companion for a nice day.' JK

Frederic Cossard "Version Sud" Grenache

2020

Vaucluse • France

[Press 4 Mix + Press 4 Red]

Frederic Cossard is known as one of the best producers of natural wine in Burgundy. Not only is he going against the grain in one of the most historic wine regions in the world, he came from a family of dairy farmers, not winemakers, making his success even more notable.

In addition to his Burgundy vines, he also buys some fruit from the south of France. This Grenache comes from the Vaucluse, an area 15 miles east of Châteauneuf-du-Pape at the base of Mont Ventoux. Juicy, dark, brambly aromas with some gamey notes, pine, and orange juice. The plump fruit is met with spicy, tingly elements and an earthy texture. Some of you had the 2019 when we had it on our shelves last spring, and this vintage is less funky and a little

darker. But it doesn't sacrifice anything over the previous vintage, it just elevates it to another level. It's an impressive zero-sulfur wine we were very excited to grab for our Direct Press members. This really shows the ability of Grenache to be deep and playful at the same time. JK



Pierre Mann of Mas des Caprices sports a Grenache Moustache
PHOTO: [MAS DES CAPRICES](#)

Domaine de Courbissac "Notre Terre" Rouge

2020

Minervois • Languedoc • France

[Press 4 Red]

Brunnhilde Claux is a young winemaker but already has quite an impressive résumé, working for Roussillon natural legend Gauby as well as Priorat's similarly heralded Terroir al Limit. With that background it's no surprise she is so skilled at working with Grenache. Her Notre Terre wines are made without any use of chemicals in the vineyards or sulfur. She uses the time-honored traditional method of the

region, employing whole cluster fermentation in concrete, with little other intervention.

The Notre Terre Rouge is 100% Grenache Noir. Rich and juicy but never feels heavy, with just a little bit of wild, animal notes coming through. Brambly raspberry, maraschino cherry, and herbaceous spice round out the profile. It has a plump immediacy and outgoing personality that is dangerously easy to drink.

Her distinctive labels, which were soundly rejected by state liquor authorities in Texas, are a tribute to Ceres. Brunnhilde describes her as “the goddess of agriculture who fertilizes Our Earth, nourishes it and protects the harvest. From this Earth, we collect the fruits, grapes of the South full of sun, joy and promise.” JK



*Maxime François Laurent and Michèle Aubéry-Laurent of
Domaine Gramenon* [PHOTO: KERMIT LYNCH WINE MERCHANTS](https://www.kermitlynch.com/wine-merchants)

Bernabeleva “Camino de Navaherros” Tinto 2020

Gredos • Madrid • Spain
[Press 4 Red]

Juan Bulnes founded Bernabeleva in 2006 and has been producing some of the best Garnacha in the Sierra de Gredos ever since. The estate is

dedicated to the regions old bush-trained vines, working organically and biodynamically, and helped put Gredos on the map. These wines represent a well-kept secret, and it honestly doesn't make much sense that we can still have these bottles on the shelf for under \$20, because they kick way above their price point.

'Camino de Navaherreros' comes from several estate plots of 40–60 year old bush vines grown on the trademark Gredos granite soils. The area's high elevation provides the perfect backdrop for growing first class Garnacha – the warm, dry days are tempered by cold nights, and just enough rainfall to keep the area lush with wild herbs and grasses, it's classically Mediterranean. Grapes are hand-harvested, and given a 25 day maceration with some whole cluster inclusion in a combination of stainless steel, concrete and large wooden vats, then aged about 10 months in steel and large barrels before being bottled unfiltered.

I feel that this wine is an unsung benchmark for Spanish Garnacha. Where most assume a wine that is pure Grenache and clocks in at 14.5% abv would most likely being a big, brooding bruiser, this little guy shows us how Garnacha grown on granite at high elevations can be precise, aromatic and downright elegant. The nose is wonderfully perfumed, it smells like the fresh wild herbs grown around the vineyards, coupled with a pretty red floral element. Medium-bodied, fresh and focused, it's super easy to drink. Bright red berry fruit, rooibos tea and a whisper of pomegranate. KS

Mas Des Caprices "Gris Gris" IGP Aude 2018
Roussillon • France
[Press 4 White]

This 100% Grenache Gris from Catalan France is a testament to how well this variety does close to its ancestral Spanish homeland. This is a bewitching wine, with waxy opulence and elegant finesse rarely found in wines made from Grenache Gris. Ripe, juicy pear with eucalyptus and salty notes are woven together with luxurious, smooth texture and a long finish. Satiating and complex, it is also perfect for seafood, especially crab and lobster. I also love wines like this as an aperitif, since the lower acidity is easier on an empty stomach.

The Gris Gris is grown on vineyards set atop a cliff overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, and it is made in concrete egg with only a small sulfur addition. Farming is certified organic and Biodynamic.

Mireille and Pierre Mann both were raised by winemaking families in Alsace and they were running a successful restaurant there before moving to the Roussillon. They were driven by what they called a ‘madness, a passion’ to start over, return to the basics, and seek out new challenges. JK

[Suriol "Cal Ron" Skin Contact 2020](#)

Penedes • Spain

[Press 4 White]

The Suriol family has been making wine in the Penedes region, about an hour east of Barcelona, since the 1600s. In the 1990s they were early adopters of organic farming and they are well-known for their sparkling wines and Cava. However, their ‘Cal Ron’ is something entirely different. 100% Garnatxa Blanca grown on calcareous loam, it is fermented on its skins for five days. Then it’s aged in a mix of chestnut, concrete, and amphora made by a local artisan from clay on their estate. Zero sulfur added.

This wine smells exactly like gingersnap cookies, in a really nice way. Round and ripe, it’s got pleasant spice and some apple cider notes, finishing with some briny complexity and a little dusting of tannin. Mostly soft, easy-going, and refreshing, this one may get a little mousey but it was nothing off-putting. I polished this off with a nice roast chicken and some carrots. Definitely great for root vegetables and salty snacks, but should also work well with tapas and any Mediterranean fare. JK



Brunnhilde Claux of Notre Terre cleaning a tank of Grenache
PHOTO CREDIT: [DOMAINE DE COURBISSAC](#)

[Vinedos del Jorco "San Esteban" Cebreros 2018](#)

Gredos • Spain

[Press 2]

Founded by partners Cesar Ruiz, Flequi Berruti and Nacho Jimenez, Vinedos del Jorco, like Bernabeleva, represent the best of the best in Gredos. Hailing from Cebreros, the first appellation in Gredos, Jorco farm some of the oldest Garnacha vines in the region, some of which are well over 100 years of age. They were able to rope Raul Perez, a man who somehow seems to be involved in every cool project in Spain, into making the wines, and have put out

some seriously delicious wines since their start in 2011.

'San Esteban' is a micro cuvee (just 520 bottles!) made just for the New York market. It comes from a single parcel of very old vines planted on the granitic soils of the Valle del Tietar. The vineyards high elevation and large diurnal temperature shifts allows for a long growing season, creating grapes of incredible concentration that retain great acidity. Fermented with native yeast in open-top barrels, with a good amount of whole cluster, then aged for 22 months in used oak. This is some next level juice. The ripeness of the vintage shines through without losing any finesse, with a flinty, slightly smoky nose, marked by sandalwood and cherry notes. The palate is concentrated, but graceful, with baking spice, citrus peel and juicy raspberry, with a long, somewhat grippy finish.

[Gramenon "La Sagesse" Côtes du Rhône 2020](#)

Southern Rhône • France

[Press 2]

It's no secret of our deep affection for the wines of Michèle Aubéry-Laurent and her son Maxime at Domaine Gramenon. She makes wines that are simultaneously hearty and lively. Not only do the wines walk a delicate tightrope between these opposing styles, they do it with flash and



excitement. This is no easy stunt to pull-off, and that's why I'm always so impressed by her work.

She and her late husband Philippe were early practitioners of natural farming practices and minimalist winemaking. An acquaintance of mine who used to spend summers in the 1980s with his grandparents in the same area recounted the local butcher, who sold Gramenon, keeping the bottles in the fridge because the corks were known to pop out from refermentation. These days that's not a concern, however. They are stable and clean, the result of many years of experience using minimal sulfur. They still produce much of the food they eat themselves and raise animals. Gramenon has been certified Biodynamic since 2010.

La Sagesse is 100% Grenache from three parcels. Two are planted on limestone outcroppings, which help give this wine just enough lift to make it sing. The third is on sandy soil facing south, adding some of the power. This is a serious, age-worthy Grenache that is up there with Châteauneuf-du-Pape. Softly floral, it's got a thick and spicy body with lots of black pepper, sweet paprika, and cedar notes. At the core is a vivid and lush concentration of fresh fruit. On the finish is some blueberry Pop-Tart goodness with cinnamon, nutmeg, and finally a little anise. A masterful balance of fruit, tannin, and transcendent energy. This will age well for 10 years but it is still very approachable now. JK

Bush-trained Garnacha vines at Viñedos del Jorco