

## AIXALÀ i ALCAIT

### DOQ Priorat, Vis de Vila Torroja

"This wine is the result of an illusion and the beginning of a dream."

it's a hard-scrabble story of love.

Jordi Aixalà married Sussi Alcait in 2006, having gone out on a limb to commercialise a few small plots in Torroja. It's another particular tale within the familiar story of renewal after abandonment. Some of these plots were in family ownership for generations but had long-since been traded through the co-op. Sussi is a local school teacher, irrepressible wit, and the communicative face of the business. Jordi worked full-time in a local cellar and tended his own vineyards in his 'spare' time.



By 2008 they had a daughter (Alzina), and Spain had 'the crisis' – really just a dreadful time to be starting a chancy new small wine business without any money. For two years, they 'sold' their fruit ... but in the end didn't get paid! While a few small releases had been made since the 1<sup>st</sup> Pardelasses in 2005, in 2012, they moved into a tiny cellar in Torroja and went all-in on releasing wine under their own label. All wines are organic and low sulphur, and farmed according to the lunar cycle. They also produce very good extra virgin olive oil from Arbequinas grown on the ridges between vine parcels. Over these years, Jordi has also doubled as mayor of Torroja, and is a leading environmental activist in the region. The winery name conjoins the surnames of Jordi and Sussi; you pronounce it in an easy phonetic flow: *aysh-lah-al-cay-eet*.

### Torroja

Torroja is a picturesque, pebble-paved little hillside village, home to about 150 folk. It's bang in the middle of DOQ Priorat. The village itself is at 330 metres, sitting above the valley of Riu Siurana. It's a remote, closed valley, somewhat box-like with high ridges to the west, north and east facing the town in the south, which sits high on the flank of Coll de la Serra. The Siurana runs diagonally away from the Montsant towards the coast, from north-east to south-west.

Looking north from Torroja are the *vilas* directly under Montsant: la Vilella Baixa, la Vilella Alta and Scala Dei (mostly hidden by the Torrojan hills). North-east are Poboleda and La Morera de Montsant. South-west through the pine forests along the path of the Siurana are the more open hills around Gratallops. Behind Torroja, over Coll de la Serra to the south-east is Porrera.



The coastal *Garbinada* breeze makes itself known here, but the inland *Serre* (Jordi calls it the *Prades*, named for its origin in the Muntanyes de Prades, north-east past Siurana) is more dominant.

Vineyards can have south, east and northern aspects, and feature typical soft, crumbly *llicorella* of course, but there are variants: some soils are iron-rich, while some have the very hard *soldó* form of *llicorella*. The wines here have less glycerol than those of Porrera and Gratallops.

The best Torrojan wines are wild, free, earthen and strikingly mineral, but lean (in glycerol terms), herbal, open and easy. *Aysh-alla-al-cay-it* - you can almost hear it on the wind ...

## The Wines and vineyards

So, we can now imagine Jordi's vineyards.

Put yourself in Torroja itself, looking north towards the Montsant out over a small basin valley rimmed by hills on all four sides and split by the Siurana river.

- On the flank of the western range is Clivelles (from 'clivellada' – broken land): here the *Llicorella* is super hard, marbly *soldó*. Oriented south and south-west, it's a small parcel of 3.5 ha, with 2.5 ha of vines.
- To the north is Pardelasses, 6 hectares of vines and 3 ha of olive and forest on Torroja's *Llicorella mort*: it's 'quebradisa', easily broken by hand – a cooler, softer, laminated crumbly slate. This vineyard is on the east-facing (cooler) side of a *barranco* (crevasse) running down to the Siurana.
- Several small parcels between these two *vinyas* are selected as 'Costers de Alzina', named for Jordi and Sussi's daughter.
- On the eastern side of the ravine from Clivelles is 'Mas d'en Bruno', a larger *partida* from which the bulk of the entry wine 'Destrankis' comes (along with de-selected gear from Clivelles and Pardelasses).



The wines feature an incredible familial resemblance based in a very cool, steely, dark mineral thread, with just a hint of truffle-pollen richness, expressing the local *Llicorella*. These are delicate, low glycerol country wines of great class, honesty and value. They also comprise a tutorial tasting from Garnatxa through blends and into pure Carinyena.

### AIXALA I ALCAIT 'Cal.Ligrama' Carinyena Rosat

Caligram, a drawing with words.

It's a pink loaded with terroir and varietal typicity, textural and interesting with food (rather than all those vapid, scared-of-life rosies).

13.5% abv, totally dry (0.83 g/l), 4g TA, only 500 bottles made (fermented in inox).



*A Rosat (Rosado) of outrageous Carinyena purple!*

*Has an excellent spicy herbal twang, steely Llicorella mineral adds to the tang, as does the wirey briariness of Carinyena. There's just a touch of glycerol, but no heat, and good acidity organises the soft, earthy fruit core.*

### AIXALA I ALCAIT 'deStranKis' Garnatxa

Since 2008. Organically-grown Garnatxa with 20% Carinyena aged 9 months in 3yo wood (French and Bulgarian) and inox foudres, very lightly filtered. This wine of younger material serves as their entry wine, a *cupatje* of several owned plots along with fruit from rented vineyards which Jordi controls. Most of the material comes from Partida 'Mas d'en Bruno', east of the ravine.

Destrankis means 'behind the back'... it's a Civil War term for assets hidden from Franco's tax collectors ... It's their response to the need for an inexpensive wine during the 'crisis'.



*Fresh, lifted and pure nose sings with shiny, mineral glossy dark slate. There are red berries in licorice, dry pine needles and that special menthol mint of Llicorella. It opens to glorious rock rose. Brambly, spicy, balsamic, pippy sweet-and-sour fruit brims with wild herbs. Beautifully 'watery', lively and refreshing, inflected with rock memory, and with the least imposing of tannins. Gentle, savoury, elegant with nice easy round rise and a gentle fall.*

### **AIXALA I ALCAIT 'Pardelasses' Garnatxa-Carinyena, Vi de la Vila Torroja**

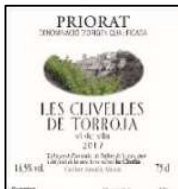
'For the donkeys'. These vineyards are extremely steep and stony, only accessible for tilling by donkey. 50/50 Garnatxa-Carinyena grown at just below 400m. Hand plunged in small tank (1,000 litres) then aged 10 months in aged 500 litre wood. The first Pardelasses (2005) was made for Jordi and Sussi's wedding in 2006!



*A gorgeous mix of red and black spiced berries organised through honey-pollen slate and lots of local balsam (cedar and herb, menthol and mint). But it's mainly a sniff and a slug of slate; tobacco, licorice, sliced steel, scattered with grated dried plumskin. The gorgeous silty-dry tannins frame but are open, yielding, releasing to acid freshness. Elegant and fine.*

### **AIXALA I ALCAIT 'les Clivelles' Single vineyard Carinyena, Vi de Vila Torroja**

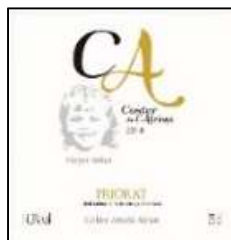
Clivelles is a vineyard on the high ridges of Torroja, in Partida 'Ferral', with very soft slate. It's Jordi's oldest vineyard, planted to Carinyena and is released as a Vi de Vila Torroja, although it qualifies as a Vi de Finca. 'Clivelles' is from *clivellada* – broken lands, indicating the steep gulleys typical here. Fermented in Inox, then 10 months ageing in 220 litre chestnut and French 225s.



*More rounded, with fuller tannin than Pardelasses (reflecting the pure Carinyena ID), but equally nimble and free. Black strawberries, rosehips, sage, in a deeply herbal wine built on the truffle-honey smell and fresh black minerality of the llicorella. It's fresh, purple-herbal with great spice and line. An easy-glide of gentle tannin and fine, refreshing acidity. Precise, focused and balanced, structurally impeccable without anything imposing. Remarkable value for a genuine great.*

### **AIXALA I ALCAIT 'El Coster de l'Alzina' Carinyena**

This wine's name means 'the slope of the oak': Alzina is the name of a local oak, after which Jordi and Sussi also named their daughter. It's based on 3 old vine parcels in the north-west between Clivelles and Pardelasses. These old vines yield just 400 grams each. After fermentation with vineyard yeast in old 500l wood, it's aged 15 months in second use oak.



*Carinyena with plenty of sweet spice and lots of room; rustic at first, this loves air and opens beautifully. Blackberry and orange with an incredible metal-mineral linger, as if you've just brushed your teeth with a chunk of rock. There's the malted bran of brown llicorella and sweet, truffle hay pollen. Earthy with blue florals and wood-spice, formed on a deep river of vegetal, spiced Carinyena tannin. The magic of Priorat in full view here: profoundly earthen, and with some power, but so easy, so intriguing, so much a wine to drink by the mouthful, as with the best of Barbaresco. Lovely, wild, spicy.*

### **AIXALA I ALCAIT 'les Clivelle's Carinyena Ranci-dolc 2011 (500ml)**

Carinyena from a very dry year with lots of natural raisining, 15.5%. Currants, yes, but *fenoloso*, *terroso*, with bran and truffle pollen, llicorella everywhere, a touch volatile, moderate sweetness.