

BODEGAS PIRINEOS (DO Somontano)

Bodegas Pirineos (Aragonés for Pyrenees) is a co-op winery in DO Somontano. This appellation is in Huesca province, nestled under the Pyrenees Mountains. The bodega is in Barbastro, the main town of the Río Vero valley (pronounced vay-do). The Vero flows south from Sierra Candelera (part of Sierra de Guara), a range of jagged colinas running west-east in front of the Pyrenees, which tower snow-laden above the scene.

Bodegas Pirineos work in 23 tiny pueblos north and west of Barbastro, in both valley and hill-slope terroirs. The hamlet of Salas Altas is the northern limit, and here the local varietal Moristel is being rescued and re-planted at 600m altitude.



The small stony hills are jagged mounds covered in scrubby pine, looking down on the valley patchwork of oaks, vineyards and agricultural fields: small plots growing the local Tomate Rosa de Barbastro on pergolas, along with almonds, cereal, and olives.

The soil is pebbly calcareous sandstone with a light pinky-red hue, sandy on the slopes and gaining a ferrous clay component in the valley. The valley is protected from harsh winds, and has a warm, mild environment, dry, with about 400 litres annual rainfall. A high diurnal temperature range helps retention of natural acidity and promote freshness.

Bodegas Pirineos is responsible for 700 hectares (nearly a quarter of the DO), farmed by 230 family growers (mostly old-timers, as youth have largely departed the agricultural scene since the post-war abandonment). In 2007, sherry house Barbadillo bought into the co-op (they own 76%), re-capitalising and re-focusing on quality. Most of the production is in French varieties, but there is some good quality Macabeo and, most importantly, 40 hectares of Moristel, now averaging 15 years' age. In 1990, this local grape was almost extinct. It is now another tale of re-discovery and recuperation of 'La Patrimonia del Campo' concurrent with a rise in capital and confidence.

Pirineos produce a large number of varietal and blend wines, reflecting the full array of Somontonan wine possibilities. For now, however, TSA focuses on the most specific offering: a variety grown nowhere else ... Moristel! Pirineos export 30% of their production, but thus far only London and Melbourne have taken on Principio Moristel...

Moristel

Synonyms: Jaun Ibáñez, Concejón and Miguel de Arcos.

A thin-skinned variety found solely in DO Somontano, under the Pyrenees. It has compact bunches of small to medium berries with a blue hue. The berries both bud and ripen late, which make it less susceptible to spring frosts, but are extremely low yielding. Most growers have replanted their old Moristel vineyards with more productive foreign grape varieties, and it constitutes a mere 1.95% of the vineyards in DO Somontano.

Moristel was traditionally blended with Parraleta, another native black grape of Somontano, and more recently with Tempranillo, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon and Syrah. It produces light wines with medium acidity and moderate alcohol, deep colour and a distinctive perfume and flavour of loganberries, red currants, and plums. Moristel is light-coloured and low glycerol, and makes a great accompaniment to the local blue mould goats' milk cheese, the semi-artesanal Radiquero, nurtured in an eponymous pueblo in the high sierra.



BODEGAS PIRINEOS 'Principio' Moristel, DO Somontano

'Principio' can mean 'first, rule, origin, source, principal ...'

Here, it denotes a return to ones' roots by working with the local cultivar. 5,000 bottles produced, from vines around 20yo grown in sandy loam, with sandstone and marl at 400-600m altitude.

Rainfall is 400mm or less. High diurnal temperature range promotes polyphenol maturity while protecting natural acidity. 4 components commenced fermentation in inox between September 5th and 21st, with 16 days' maceration. 3.18pH, 7.06 g/l ta, 12.5% a/v.

Unwooded, unfiltered, unfined, minimal sulphur, "just the naturally fermented grape, bottled".

BODEGAS PIRINEOS 'Principio' Moristel 2016



A glorious dark ruby: deep, cloudy and bright thanks to low PH. Clean and red-fruited, it's a Quiet Riot of salted plum, sweet currant and smoky-floral blackberry -cane tea. The palate is cool-tempered, lean and briary with cold wet-slate minerals. The citric-acid tartness is leavened by a mid-palate layer of dried cranberry. Aromatically persistent, and stimulating in the mouth.

BODEGAS PIRINEOS 'Principio' Moristel 2017

This was fermented with natural yeast, aged in inox, 13.5% avb

Smokey-woody red fruits, lightly charred chestnut leaves and fine sour cherry/dried cranberry ... you can't help but think of tracking a rabbit with a shotgun in your crook, hunching under encinas, swooshing/crunching through dried grasses, smelling dust and feeling the fresh chill of the Pyrenees creeping in ... 2017 is less sour than 2016, more generous with a touch of roundness, essentially in the same style, but better. Non-frutale, non-glyceric still, just a bit more-better mouthfeel. Lovely leafy-vegetal-light spice perfume finish has excellent linger. Yum!

BODEGAS PIRINEOS 'Impás' Macabeo, DO Somontano



Grown in very dry sandy foothills, this is Jesus' first mono-varietal white: small berries are cropped at 4 t/ha spend 5 months on fine lees in acero. The wine represents an update/recovery of a historical wine of the region. Traditionally, Somontano growers aged late-picked, dry, concentrated Macabeo in barrels at home, reserved as their family party wine. It is a style that is even recognised in the regulations of DO Somontano as "late-harvest Macabeo". Out of fashion, in 1996 Bodegas Pirineos discontinued it. Aged on lees, without oak, 2016 'Impás' is Jesus Astrain's re-engagement with varietal Macabeo, explicitly textural rather than aromatic in intent. Welcome back!

BODEGAS PIRINEOS 'Impás' Macabeo 2016

'es Farinoso', it smells of cereal, like ripe wild wheat. It's simple, soft, earthy and attractive. The mouth is fresh with good natural acid salt-rimming round, gently textural fruit.

MORISTEL 'PRINCIPIO': winemaker's notes

"Moristel is always harvested in the last week of September. It is a medium cycle variety, budding somewhat later than the rest of varieties in the region, which makes it better for avoiding spring frosts and at the same time allows for good development prior to the harvest. It is harvested after most of the Cabernet Sauvignon. The normal yields are 4,000 kg / ha. This variety is officially defined as having medium-sized low density bunches. The berry is spherical and medium size, with blue-black skin and a short stalk. It is not very vigorous and the plant is slightly drooping in aspect. Average grape productivity.

The secret to the success of this wine is to separate the vineyards according to their potential and to select the highest potential for Principio. The ideal grape should have 12.5-13.5 Baumé and 4.2 of total acidity. It is important not to force the extraction during the maceration, but look for the balance. The power of this wine does not come from the amount of polyphenols but from the potency of the fruit and its acidity. It has an aromatic palette that goes from strawberries and raspberries to tea, honeysuckle and aromatic hops (which is a Cannabaceae, like marijuana).

Yeasts. The previous year we selected yeasts on the best plots of Moristel del Somontano. Subsequently we performed microvinifications. We tasted the wine and analyzed it and selected 2 yeasts: the Pir 45 which is a Saccharomyces and the Pir 80, which is a Torulaspora. We inoculated the must with both strains to start the fermentation. First the Torula works until the 5% of alcohol is reached, which is the maximum it can tolerate and then the Saccharomyces fermentation takes over. In this way we get the aromas, sweetness and volume provided by Pir 80, the aromatic expression of Pir 45 and the guarantee of a full fermentation. Exclusive yeasts reinforce the concept of Terroir and the typicity of Somontano, on this unique varietal."

Jesus Astrain, Winemaker, Bodega Pirineos

DO Somontano

Somontano DO is located in northern Spain in the province of Huesca at the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains (Somontano literally translates to the 'foot of the mountain'). It's half way between Barcelona and Pamplona, at the cultural crossroads of Aragon-Catalunya/Navarre-Basque. DO Somontano was incepted in 1984 and controls 30 producers across 3,000 hectares of vines.

The DO is made up of 43 municipalities divided into three distinct zones: The ranges, Somontano itself, and the plains. Its total area covers over 200,000ha with only 4,400ha planted to vine.

Somontano has a continental climate with hot summers and cold winters and an average annual temperature of 11°C. The altitude ranges from 350m to 1,000m with an average rainfall of about 500mm, virtually all falling in winter. The vines are planted mainly on brown limestone soils. The DO is now dominated by French varieties with Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot the most planted red varieties. Grape varieties grown in the region which qualify for the DO status are Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Tempranillo, Syrah, Garnacha Tinta, Moristel, Parraleta and Pinot Noir for black grapes and Chardonnay, Gewürztraminer, Macabeo, Sauvignon Blanc, Garnacha Blanca, Riesling and Alcañón blancos.

The history of the region dates back to second century BC. Viticulture had expanded to Huesca by the Middle Ages (monasteries were instrumental in the planation of new vineyards and improving winemaking techniques). The devastation of French vineyards by phylloxera in the second half of the 19th century boosted production, sales and exports of Somontano wines along with other lesser-known wine parts of Spain, such as Mallorca. Somontano acquired DO status in 1984.

