

Blai Ferré i Just – Priorat (vi de vila masos del falset)



Blai Ferré i Just is a young Priorat winemaker, currently managing both his wife's family's Gratallops label, Celler Cecilio, and also his personal project from vineyards in Masos del Falset. Blai got his start working for Alvaro Palacios and Celler Capçanes before joining Celler Cecilio, and then finally striking out on his own.

Masos del Falset is a Priorat Vi de Vila appellation located in the DO Montsant village of Falset, which has a municipal footprint encroaching on DOQ Priorat llicorella soils as well as DO Montsant limestone. Thus, in Falset one can produce either DO Montsant or DOQ Priorat wine, depending on the soils of one's vineyards. From two Priorat-soiled Falset vineyards, Blai makes an entry wine, 'Billo' and an old vine selection, 'Desnivell'. Blai purchased the two vineyards in 1998.

MAS DEL BILLO

The Billo vineyard is 6.3 hectares, 4.5 ha of which is vineyard. The 'Mas' is a little secret basin valley, with north, south and westerly aspects arrayed around an old (1720) Masia or farmhouse, called 'Mas del Billo'. Billo had been abandoned for 20-30 years when Blai purchased it, and had largely returned to wildness. He planted Billo in 1999 onto low vigour, drought-adapted rootstocks – a mix of 40% each Garnatxa and Syrah, with Caranyena and Cabernet, following the trend of the time. Billo is currently on trellis which Blai is working to convert. It's a poor site, very rocky and with little organic material and has a terroir slightly variant from most Priorat llicorella, characterised by *Soldó*, a harder slate typical near Falset. A green harvest regulates fruit to around 1.5kg/vine.



Blai's style is to under-extract and gently nurture wines so that the dazzling minerality of Priorat's smoky schist can shine through in the wines. He picks on taste, ferments with wild yeast and does not acidify (the wines are around 5.5 g/l TA). A light sulphur addition is given pre-bottling, which takes place without filtration. Varieties are fermented separately in 2,000 litre stainless, temperature-controlled to around 27 degrees. Billo spends about 25 days macerating at just 24 degrees. Although matured in stainless, long maturation helps avoid reduction – it's aged 10 months before bottling without oak. First release was 2007 (in 2018, the first bottling was lushly truffly, deeply earthy and powerfully spicy).



Blai Ferré i Just 'Billo' Masos del Falset Garnatxa blend, DOQ Priorat BFJ 'Billo 2017

Fine, radiant floral red berry and brightly mineral, with a shot of cold dark tea, touch of angelica, branch, subtle glycerol and boysenberry. Mid-weight, round, gathered and releasing, finely laced with acid and spice threading out from radiating tannin fronds, gently earthen, polished, both lifted and lingering. GREAT.

BFJ 'Billo 2016

This is as pure an expression of Priorat's amazing llicorella schist terroir as you are likely to see. Uncluttered by winemaking, and uncovered by oak, the soil rings out on the nose and sings through the palate. Everything is place (grape FX are in there somewhere, for sure): sweet blue-note liquorice and smoke, cold and damp rock, balsam, boysenberry juice and flowers, a sparkly mineral ripple, really neat tannin carrying all along in an earthy gurgle.

BFJ 'Billo 2015

Billo loves air and although not closed or big when first uncorked, really opens out to a gentle country wine style of considerable charm and grace. Red and root vegetable fruit aromas in a gentle earthen nose with baking spice, multi-botanical balsam and a touch of anisey soot telling the llicorella. Down in the extreme south of Priorat, the Massos del Falset schist is a little earthier and less pungently mineral-smoky-tangy than say Gratallops. The palate has nice volume – it's a generous mid-weight, but all sits nicely within the rim – there are no extractive bulges or heat flares, just nicely rounded fruit with an herbal-mineral-inflected gentle acid frame and a soft, easy landing. Very pleasant earthen perfumes linger and fill the mouth after swallowing and the last thing left is the pippy purity of lovely sweet, beautifully ripe seeds of grapes.

FINCA DESNIVELL, masos del falset

Desnivell is a 2.4 hectare 'Coster' – an old, steep-sloped vineyard planted (1946) to now 80+ year old Garnatxa Negra and Garnatxa Peluda bush vines planted on wild American rootstocks. Desnivell is a sunny vineyard oriented to the interior (facing west and south-west), and uncultivated. It's nestled among hazelnut and pine forest at 400m altitude, and also has some (more recently planted) Cabernet and Syrah. The soil is laminated brown slate, allowing 14 metres of root depth for the old vines. Fruit yield is a pitiful 1 tonne/ha, or about 300 grams per bush vine (even so, Blai battles local wild boar for title to the scarce fruit.) After a gentle, long maceration, the wine settles in stainless for a month (to settle lees and avoid reduction in cask) then ages about a year in seasoned large French oak. Desnivell is Catalan for 'uneven/unlevel' ..., referencing the generally steep, irregular and difficult location.



Blai Ferré i Just 'Desnivell' Vineyard, Vi de Vila Masos del Falset Garnatxa de Coster



2015: Fleshy and super mineral, the nose is floral red berry and smoky llicorella. The palate is soft and round, briary and sweetly earthy, with metal-fresh mineral tang in a balsamic finish. The potash, truffled-earthen nobility of the brown slate is laced with nutmeg spice. A wine of incredible line, it's never strict nor strong, and is nipped at the rim by a flash of acidity in the steely mode of llicorellan minerality.

2014: More balsamic maturity, more oak tannin, with earthy portobellos in red cherry liquor. Fine and elegant spiced red berry, and quite structured.

2013: Warm smoky and briary mineral, very much feels of slate on tongue. Quite herbal, minty, and balsamic, not so rounded, with light glycerol.

2010: Earth funk, opens to all the bracken, metal-mineral, earthen, spiced taste of place ... balsamic soup served in a rock bowl!

2009: Experimental first year release. Round and spiced, oak a little prominent and dry, but the country feels of this are a good tell of what to come.

VIMEO: A jaunty Catalan soundtrack accompanies this Vimeo presentation of Mas del Billo: <https://vimeo.com/157084690>

