

CLARÍTO by scott, leah, eva and oscar

A *clarete* of Viura white and red Garnacha, based on an old field blend vineyard in Briones.

Claríto (“the little clear one”) is 50-50 Garnacha and Viura. It comes from “our own” (controlled for us, while we try to buy it) vineyard of old bush-vines from the Briones municipality, grown in the foothills between Oullari and Hormilla. We’re in the Najerilla Valley, heading south up into the pebbly chalk/red sand foothills under Sierra de la Demanda. These foothills are the traditional home of *Clarete* and the field blend vineyard that we’ve secured was purpose-planted in order to make *Clarete* nearly 100 years ago.



A terroir dry pink!

Claríto might even be the current zeitgeist’s greatest utility player, effectively combining the ideas of white wine, skin contact wine, orange wine and *Rosado* in one lovely, sensual package!

Ordinarily, Claríto will be a single vineyard, single pick, field blend ‘grand cru’ pink wine. In some years, the Viura ripens ahead of the Garnacha and we can’t pick it in one coupe. In which case we buy organic, low alcohol Viura from a producer we like who have vineyards of cold limestone-chalk soils under Montes Obarenes in Anguciana. This was the case with our first ever issue, the 2020 Claríto.

For 2021, the field blend harvest took place on October 2nd and the wine was co-fermented after three days of maceration: with stems for red, without for white; the red decanted on top of the white), and was then softly pressed to 65% yield. It fermented in a mix of inox and oak vat (2 x 500L), went through malo and then aged 7 months with lees. At Scott’s behest, Oscar bought some very cute little concrete cubes for the ageing. ABV 12.4%, 3.28 pH, TA 5.2 mg tartaric (after full malo!). 25 mg/litre sulphur at bottling. Very dry.

We wanted to make a serious dry pink wine of texture, flavour, freshness and space. Before malo, the fruit has almost exaggerated freshness; after malo this vibrancy is balanced with a voluptuous entry, clear, mineral mid-palate texture, complexity and a clean, long, very pretty finish.



The palest faded pink rose petal to look at, lucid and brilliant (clarete does mean ‘cleary’, after all). Ruby grapefruit, angelica, rosewater jelly all feature in gorgeous vegetal smells between rose and geranium. It’s fragrant in the most beautiful way, without anything heady or cloying. While it’s Garnacha pink to smell, the palate’s where you see the skin contact maturity and subtle power of properly elaborated white. The soil contributes a delicate crackle of limestone soil energy, with an oyster shell edge. Dry, gently rich, it’s a wine of stoney texture, evenly spread, gently tooled, savoury, seamless, graceful.

The Story of Clarete

Together, Alegre y Valgañón and I have rescued a historically important style of dry pink, called *Clarete*. In 2015, this type of wine did not (visibly, at least) exist in the market. If you looked it up on the 'net, you got absolutely nothing. Wine style, gone.

"What (you may well ask) is a *Clarete*?"

"Both the history of Spanish wine, and currently illegal", would be my obtuse shorthand reply ...

A *Clarete* is cursorily similar to a *Rosado*/Rosé but with two fundamental differences:

- *Rosados* are the fermentation of free-run red wine juice.

Claretes have a significant admixture (anywhere from 25-75%) of white grapes.

- also unlike early-pressed *Rosados*, *Claretes* have plenty of pre-fermentation skin

contact, and may even be fermented and aged with skins.

Rosados drink like light reds. Pale orange, see-through *Claretes* drink like well-structured white wines blushed with red wine flavour and perfume. The colour of a *Clarete* is referred to as 'Ojo de Gallo', or 'Rooster Eye'. The drink, however, is far from bleary!

Claretes have been extremely important wines in Spanish history – especially during the down days of the post-Civil War Abandonment. Most of Ribera del Duero and Cigales and a lot of Rioja and Bierzo was about the production and consumption of *Claretes* (historically, red and white grapes co-fermented in open concrete vats and aged for as much as a year in caves). However, contemporary appellations no longer have a legal classification available for such a style (the progressive Bierzo appellation has just re-activated the term).

It is still possible to find *Claretes* in remote corners.

The restaurant wine-list in the little Rioja village of Sajazarra (where Oscar and Eva have their bodega and cellar) has a section headed '*Clars*' (clear wines): it lists half a dozen wines labelled as *Rosado*; all of which are actually *Claretes*. And there is a mythical '*Clarete-land*' (I'm not making this up): the historical *Clarete*-production zone in the Najerilla valley between the villages of San Asensio, Cárdenas and Cordovin. There remains a local festival each July, the '*Clarete* battle' of San Asensio, predictably comprised of punters eating and drinking lots, doubtless all the while spraying *Clarete* over one another.

By 2015, the ongoing existence of *Clarete* culture had become the open secret of the Najerilla Valley, and was simply not noticed elsewhere. Over the years, I heard whispers and snippets, here and there, over and again, about the historical importance of *Clarete* wines, but had never seen one. Each trip, hearing more, I was increasingly motivated to find out about this ghost style. How could it be that a wine so significant was not only absent from the contemporary wine scene, but that there be no trace left? No old bottles to be found, no reference to read, even on the internet. On my 2016 research trip I made the *Clarete* question my muse point. I found the perfect collaborator in Oscar Alegre: incredibly well-versed in history, both an academic and a passionate imbibor of delicious liquids and their deep history.

I asked Oscar.

Oscar knew.

Oscar showed me.

Together we decided to do something about it.

We decided to bring *Clarete* all the way back.



I commissioned Oscar to make me a *Clarete*, for the purpose of which he sub-commissioned *el Rey de Clarete*, Honorio Rubio in Cárdenas to make a wine for us. The first Alegre y Valgañón I commissioned was the only wine in the world bottled as *Clarete* at the time! For 2 years we bottled our *Clarete* as Alegre y Valgañón, but have since shipped it under Honorio's own label as 'Tremendus' *Clarete*.

The day we first discussed this missing wine style and agreed to bring it back, Oscar and I were standing in Carra Santa Domingo, a natural field blend of very old Garnacha and Viura. Oscar declared his dream of releasing a radical single vineyard wine. By the harvest of 2018, Oscar's personal dream was realised. 2018 is the first release of Carra Santa Domingo *Clarete*, a single vineyard, field blend Grand Cru Pink. It's made in a relatively red wine register, with 35% Viura, wild yeast fermentation in open topped 500 litre French oak, 20% stems, fermented and macerated 20 days. Softly pressed, there was enough wine to fill a single 400l cask which underwent spontaneous malo. There was a single racking and the wine was bottled unfiltered, unfinned. 530 bottles only.

Oscar and Eva's job done, now we've moved onto another such purpose-planted field blend vineyard to make TSA's *Clarete*, from which we hope to release our own wine ongoing.

The label art is by Leah Teschendorff.

