

## CLARÍTO by scott, leah, eva and oscar

By 2015, Spain's historical CLARETE style of dry pink wine had effectively ceased to exist. If you looked up Clarete on the WWW, you'd get a "meh, this doesn't exist" search response. In 2016, Scott and Oscar decided that TSA in conjunction with Alegre y Valgañon would reintroduce Clarete to the market. Several iterations later, nowadays, they make their own.

*Meet: 'Claríto' – the little clear one.*

### CLARETE

- It's not Rosé: Rosé is French (and possibly Australian), in Spanish it's *Rosado* (unless it's *Rosat* in Catalan!)
- But *Clarete* is not *Rosado* either: Yes, *Rosado* is *castellano* for dry pink wine, in the form of very light dry red, served cold. The typical Spanish style is dry, vinous, textural, interesting gastronomically, and good at rinsing the palate, at 'grading' the road in one's mouth. But, *Rosado* is a wine made from red grapes, with little skin contact. This is another form of Dry Pink Wine entirely ...
- *Clarete* mixes white and red grapes, with a significant textural contribution from extended skin contact. It's doubly "not-Rosado" because of the high proportion of white grapes and resultant skins feels.
- Through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the pragmatics of poverty during the Abandonment Era, much of Spain's basic wine production was *Clarete* ...
  - Ribera del Duero?: one long valley as a giant field blend of red and white grapes!
  - Galicia?: many hundred hectares of Palomino planted in alluvial soil joined with native Galician red varieties to form another giant pool of *Clarete* ...
  - ... and la Rioja?: the southern foothills of Rioja, particularly in the valley of Rio Najer (aka Valle de Najerilla) have long been the traditional home of *Clarete*-making, using Viura white and Garnacha red beautifully suited to the red clay-limestone soils at high altitude under Sierra de la Demanda. Pragmatically, in recent decades *Claretes* had come to be labelled as *Rosado* to confirm with appellation regulations, but *Clarete* was hiding in plain sight all along, in towns like San Asensio, Cardenas and Cordovin.



So, what is the grape mix of a *Clarete*?

There really are no rules: the style is barely tolerated by the D.O., after all! The informal convention is that a *Clarete* is at least 25% each of white and red grapes. With a lot of white in the mix, these wines are low in skin colour – relatively 'clear', hence '*Clars*' or clear wines. AND, the lack of colour pigment in the maceration and fermentation mix means we can macerate longer, get more texture and flavour yet still have the desirable light pink colour. *Claretes*, mixing white and red grapes, have extended skin contact over several days (rather than the minutes/few hours typical of *Rosé/Rosado*), and thus can be highly textural wines with great mouthfeel character, vinosity and skins effects.

*Claretes* might 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, fresh, mineral, clear pink package. Flavour, texture and clarity – how glorious!



## WELCOME TO CLARÍTO GENERATION II

Claríto (“the little clear one”) is a co-production between The Spanish Acquisition and our dear friends Oscar and Eva of Alegre y Valgañon, perhaps contemporary Rioja’s shiniest face. Claríto was first produced in the 2020 vintage and its initial iterations were based on a little vineyard in the Najerilla Valley, above *pueblo* Briones. With the new 2022 vintage, our 3<sup>rd</sup> Claríto feels like we are entering a Second Generation in terms of sourcing and handling this rapidly evolving project.

### **CLARÍTO, a *Clarete* of Viura-Garnacha, DOCa Rioja (*Pueblos Sajazarra y San Vicente*)**

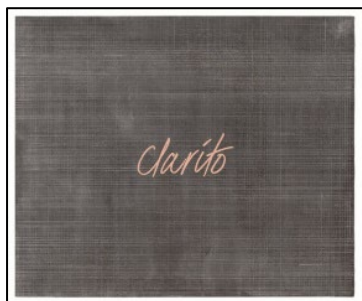
in 2022, we changed the fruit-sourcing regime for Claríto, so that we were able to really control important picking decisions far better than we had been able to with a prickly owner-grower in Briones. 2022 is a 60-40 mix of Viura and Garnacha. The Viura comes from gorgeous 12yo bush vine re-plantings in Eva and Oscar’s winemaking hometown, Sajazarra. Here in the cold, chalky and very pebbly soils under Montes Obarenes in the deep north-west of la Rioja, Viura is marvellously mineral, fine and contained. The Garnacha, delicate and fluent, is from a special 60 year-old vineyard in San Vicente, co-operatively managed and shared by Oscar and Jose Gil. This vineyard is in *Paraje la Canoca*, north of San Vicente, with chalky soil at 600+ metres in altitude under Sierra Cantabria.

Claríto is a tribute to the deep traditions of Rioja, updated perhaps.

‘Back in the day’ such wines were the epitome of a Village Rioja. In little towns, a small amount of Viura would trickle in, but it would take days to fill a press, so it was ‘little-by-little’ adding whatever correctly-picked fruit came in until a batch was ready, first white then later some red. In 2022 we mapped a simple version of this model: the Viura was picked (September 14<sup>th</sup>), de-stemmed and macerated for 3 days or so until the red was ready to pick. This was added as 100% whole bunch Garnacha atop the white. After a couple of days co-maceration, it was gently pressed to a yield of just 65%. The young *Clarete* must was then left to ferment spontaneously in combination of a 3,200L raw concrete vat and a 2,000L stainless tank. Working with lots of skins, the fermentation started easily and was done in 8 days. The young wine and its fine lees were then aged in gorgeous raw concrete cubes for 8 months (a portion aged in a single old 1,000 litre foudre).

The wine is perfectly protected at all times by its constant contact with skins and lees, stirred occasionally for protective reduction. Along the way a natural malolactic conversion takes place in the facilitative environment of skin contact and low sulphur (no additions). Before malo, the fruit has almost exaggerated freshness; after malo this vibrancy is balanced with a voluptuous entry, clear and mineral mid-palate texture and complexity with a clear, long and very pretty finish. Chalky throughout. Production total: 6,250 bottles, 13.1% ABV, 3.38pH, 4.9g TA, 1 g/l residual. Claríto’s gorgeous label is an original artwork by Leah Teschendorff.

The intention here is a serious dry pink wine combining freshness with texture, flavour with space.



*The subtle orange look of Claríto ‘22 is matched in smell with a line of tangerine skin. This fragrance plays beautifully in an air of ‘dust in a Rioja vineyard’, along with faded roses. Dried cereal and sea shell smells tell of Viura grown in chalk. The nose is deep, bell-clear, like smelling the water in a well, many feet down, below the dust, the heat, the haze. Cool and still. The throat develops a deep compulsive tickle of desire to swallow. One is drawn in. Pickled watermelon, Turkish delight and raspberry hint of forthcoming satisfaction.*

*In the mouth, there’s savoury roundness backlit citric with orange and golden persimmon, crabapples, brushed steel earthiness, faded florals. Steel magnolias and cherry skins in short. It’s edged by deep chalky minerality and run through with tangible energy ... a circle with a line through it. Plenty of skinsy-tannin mouthfeel gives ungrippy grip, presence without tension. Open. Slow. Symbolic. Satisfying.*

## CLARÍTO GENERATION I – the foundation vintages

The original Clarítos, 2020 and 2021, were 50-50 Garnacha and Viura from a vineyard of old bush-vines in 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 clay/sand foothills under Sierra de la Demanda. These foothills are the traditional home of *Clarete* and the field blend vineyard that we originally used was purpose-planted in order to make *Clarete* nearly 100 years ago.



A terroir dry pink!

The owner of this vineyard proved 'rather' difficult to deal with and after the first two vintages, we moved on happily to other sources, but the Briones vineyard was an ideal launching place for us to understand what we wanted to achieve with our *Clarete* and the results were terrific.

The red and white were picked together and then 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 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.

*The palest faded pink rose petal to look at, lucid and brilliant (Clarete does mean 'clear', 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 back-story of *Clarete*

Together, Alegre y Valgañon and TSA 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 imbiber 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 Valgañon 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 Valgañon, 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 was the first release of Carra Santa Domingo *Clarete*, a single vineyard, field blend Grand Cru light red. 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, the vineyard yields enough wine to fill a single 400l cask which undergoes spontaneous malo. After a single racking, the wine is bottled unfiltered, unfinned.

With Oscar and Eva's single vineyard vision realised, we moved on to creating TSA's 'personal' vision *Clarete*, and after much discussion of processes and style (Scott's adoration of raw concrete and relatively long controlled oxidative ageing on a dry pink), we sourced a vineyard in Briones from which to make the initial Claríto from the 2020 harvest.