

Jose Gil

Riojas del pueblo San Vicente

JOSE GIL wines are the village-specific Rioja project of husband-and-wife viti-vini team, Jose and Vicki Gil. The Jose Gil wines are our window into the north-central Riojan village San Vicente. The full title of this *pueblo* is San Vicente de la Sonsierra, but this gets us into murky waters, as 'de la Sonsierra' buys into the *Basque* versus *Castellano* division in la Rioja. While culturally important, this division plays out badly in wine logic, under-pinning the bogus sub-regional divisions of Rioja Alta, Alavesa and Oriental (Baja). So, for us, short and simple - just San Vicente, thanks.

Jose and Vicky (and Maia)

Jose is from a multi-generational line of Gils working their family's Rioja winery. Vicki previously worked in the Bilbao restaurant trade. Jose and Vicky started their project as a hobby with a tiny release in 2016. Prior to that, Jose had been doing small patch/small batch experiments with non-industrial practises within the family winery: no herbicides, yield control, sulphur reduction, whole clusters, foot treading, and experimenting with the impact of location choices for ageing (the family bodega versus a medieval cellar high up in the town castle). Frost caused them to skip 2017, but they successfully made fresh Atlantic wines in 2018 and more rounded 2019s from that warm but also frosted harvest. These were all effectively 'garage' wines.



Photo: Dave Worthington

By 2020, they were finally able to commit entirely to their wine business, working it full time as a couple, and considered themselves practising *cosecheros* – working the full cycle from pruning to label design, sales and distribution across their six hectares (1ha rented, the rest owned). The 2020 vintage saw the advent of *parcela*-specific bottlings and a more realistic total production of 6,500 bottles. In 2020 they also shifted from fermenting in 300L to little 500L 'foudres'.

The marvellous quality 2021 vintage also becomes the first year in which they are able to get a meaningful number of bottles out into the market - including satisfying their Australian agent with enough wine for us finally release them publicly! 2019 and 2020 were hand-sold by TSA without a public profile. By 2021, the family had grown to three, with baby Maia born, and the project had grown to around 20,000 bottles of very personal, hand-made wine. Critics are already raving about Jose as one of the greats, and he's not yet thirty years old! For now at least, the wines are both available, and radically affordable!

San Vicente

San Vicente sits in between Labastida (just 5km to its west) and Laguardia (15 km to the east), along the emblematic progression from the Atlantic end of Rioja to the Mediterranean, from Haro to Logroño. The drive under the peaks of the Sierra Cantabria (specifically, Sierra de Toloño) is some of the most gorgeous road-work you can do in any wine country.

A typical geographic feature in Rioja are flat-topped, shark-toothed hills rising out of the valley floor; these wouldn't look out of place in Monument Valley – they certainly give a medieval Wild West look. San Vicente is the most spectacularly-sited of several such hill-peak towns scattered across the valley floor as the Ebro River winds its way east (Briones, 4km south-west across the Ebro is another such). The San Vicente hill rises abruptly from the valley floor. It's a beacon from miles around. Up on top in the town is the only place you can really study and understand just how buckled, folded, layered and complex the vineyard orography really is.



Photo: Dave Worthington

San Vicente village started out as a walled fortress housing Navarrans within the Davalillo castle and is now home to about 1,200 folk. To its north are tiny Riojan mountain *pueblos*, Peciña and Rivas de Tereso, sub-parts of the San Vicente wine municipality. The village appellation is home to about 3,000 hectares of vines, 85% *en vaso*, with an average plot size 0.5ha.

Terroir and place in San Vicente

There are many San Vicentes: an array of soils, altitudes from 400-680m and varied orientations. We have limestone and/or sandstone silts, sands and pebbles; clay and clay with limestone; bedrocks of limestone or sandstone. Some soils are deep, some whisper-shallow, most are in complex layers. Some material is formed in situ, some weathered in situ, some weathered elsewhere and deposited as sedimentary layering (patches of alluvial soil with pebbles are sediments from Sierra de Tolono).

We should start with a note on the place-name schema in la Rioja: we can have village wines, *Vinos de Pueblo*, in this instance San Vicente. More specifically, we can then have special places within the villages, and these are called *Parajes* (the same term applies in Bierzo and in Priorat - where, in Catalan, it's *Paratge*). These *Parajes* (par-aach-kays), equate to the *Pagos* of Marco de Jerez, the *Crus* of Barolo and France's *Lieus-dits*). Then, within the places are the special vineyards, or *Parcelas* (if specially classified, these might be labelled *Viñedos Singulares*). In Jose and Vicky's case, it happens that three of their vineyards have identical *Parcela* and *Paraje* names, making them the 'It' of 'Here'.

The town land of San Vicente is primarily organised around six small valleys, or *Parajes*: el Bardallo, Camino de Rivas and la Canoca are the highest, arranged west-to-east above the village and below the Cantabrian ranges. Around the feet of the town are San Martin, Cuatro Caminos and la Rad. Jose and Vicky take some fruit from each of these bar la Rad. In total, they own five hectares across seven *parcelas* and rent a further hectare from three small plots. Jose and Vicky make la Conoca, el Bardallo and Camino de Rivas as *Parcela-within-Paraje* wines, or single vineyards. The village wine is from five of San Vicente's six *Parajes*, la Rad excepted.

A pair of Bodegas

Initially, the Jose Gil wines were made in the bodega of Jose's family - his father and uncle have Bodegas Olmaza, outside town. Jose started working here, from 2011-2018 before going solo.

Nowadays, wine-making and ageing takes place across two cellars. Jose and Vicky rent space in a tech complex in Briones, which, while not pretty is very functional, and here most of the basic making takes place. They also have a tiny, ancient (medieval) cellar in the ramparts of the Davalillo castle atop the crag of San Vicente. Jose bought this as an 18yo ... he has always been a young man on a serious mission!

What's behind the locked door, Was? Jose's Medieval Cellar, photo by Greta Moon



Fermentation takes place in Briones, in a series of concrete cubes, with about 20% stems, except for those parcels deeply influenced by limestone, in which case the whole bunch ratio might go out to about 30%. Sixty percent of the wine ages in large, neutral casks in the castle holdfast. These give a slow evolution at 13 degrees in a perfect, moist, quiet cellar informed by mountain air off the Toloño. The other 40% ages in large, neutral concrete where they fermented in Briones.

What to expect?

Great, terroir-specific wines made by a committed, hard-working wife-and-husband team. Atlantic blue note and tannin silkiness melded with Mediterranean red note, earthen and gravel-tannined aspects. Perfumed, rounded wines, no oak to discuss. Medicinal bark, juniper and spice in a mix of orchard fruit flesh, with gentle tannins, flavoursome acidity, sandstone. These are genuine village wines: you can't find their likeness in Haro to the west nor in the east towards Logroño; they are certainly wine styles you can't get from the factories banging out those bloody *reservas*.

Photo: Leah Teschendorff

JOSE GIL *vino de pueblo San Vicente*

This village wine is from a collection of vineyards in the highlands around San Vicente, at altitudes of 500m and above, from different sites and soils. Of San Vicente's six valleys, all but la Rad figure. The composition is Tempranillo with 20% Garnacha and a little Viura. Manual harvest; destemmed; all the plots are made separately, then blended.



After fermentation in the concrete cubes in Briones, 40% of the village blend lingers in concrete, while the balance has ten months of gentle ageing in old 500L barrels in the medieval cellar of San Vicente's Castle Davalillo. Bottled in November the year after harvest. 2019 gave only 1,500 bottles; from 2020 there were 3,600. By 2021, however, a small-but-meaningful 16,000 bottle production means Australia finally gets a useful allocation!



The whole orchard on display: wood, flowers and fruits of cherry, apple, boysenberry, plum, blackberry. Cut to shape by hyssop, juniper, dry brown spices, orchard bark. Savoury-juicy, open, perfumed, round. Gravel and iron soil nuance the satin fruit-tannin sumptuousness. A wine of great harmony and balance, and as it lingers, fruitfulness is beautifully trimmed by tannin to the finish where spice, bitters and easy nutty acid join in the violets-in-earth gorgeousness.

JOSE GIL *Vino de parcela el Bardallo (Paraje Bardallo, San Vicente)*

Paraje el Bardallo is North-west of San Vicente, well on the way to neighbouring village, Labastida, underneath the legendary Remelluri estate. It's planted to dry-grown bush-vines *en vaso*, about 40 years old, at 515m, with northeast orientation and calcareous soil. Bardallo is home to delicate, vertical wines; the fruit here is blue note, fluid and quite spicy.



Photo: Dave Worthington

Tempranillo with a small percentage of Viura. Harvested by hand, 100% destemmed. Fermented in concrete, aged 10 months in 500L French oak. Limited production: Australian allocation 24 bottles.



This parcel has the darkest fruits among the single vineyards and is the most primary and fruitful of them. Floral, densely meaty but fluid, plummy and round with lots of ripe skins, a touch of tobacco and a lash of medicinal wood bitters. Regally earthy in deep purple tones, it literally spangles with mineral detail, like a sequin dress. Within the tannins, you find both chalkiness and juiciness, performing a density-relief moebius-strip double act.

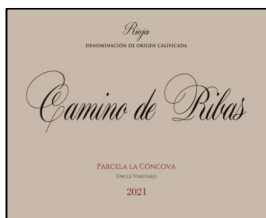
JOSE GIL *Vino de parcela la Cóncova (Paraje 'Camino de Ribas', San Vicente)*

Photo: Greta Moon

In between Canoca and Bardallo is Camino de Ribas (in the hamlet of Ribas de Tesoro). This is the coldest and freshest valley, as the gap north towards the Toloño allows ingress of strong north winds from the Atlantic. Jose and Vicky work here with two parcels. The western side is a hectare they planted in 2016. Here are young vines of red and white Garnacha and some Moscatel, in sandy loam, with iron and chalk over sandstone bedrock.



They also take some kilos from Jose's parents' plot, a 20 metre walk east across the access track. Here are 140yo bush vines of Garnacha and Tempranillo in pale sand at 610m surrounded by many scrubland grasses (lavender, thyme, rosemary...). The finished wine is 50% Tempranillo, 40%Garnacha and some Viura and other whites. Harvested by hand, 100% destemmed. Aged 10 months in 500L French oak in the castle cellar. Limited production: Australian allocation 30 bottles.



Redolent of cold earth, blue fruits filled with sweet spices and scrubby balsamics - juniper with its bitter back note, cinchona bark, sweet, floral fennel, thyme. Pomegranate seeds, raspberry and compote fruits. Sandstone pebbles give a fine grit, the feeling of being down in the riverbed. La Cóncova flows out on a line, with gloriously sweet-spiced, chalk-flecked, nutty tannins. Fluidity from perfectly ripened seeds, laced with an astringent stretch from all the herbal-balsamic action.

JOSE GIL *Vino de parcela la Canoca (Paraje la Canoca, San Vicente)*

North-east of town, on the cold slopes up towards the Sierra de Toloño, is Valle la Canoca, formed by little Rio la Canoca. Jose and Vicky have a parcel in the top stretch of this valley, above 600m, yielding red fruited, floral wines. The soil of la Canoca is silt with a high percentage of limestone, surrounded by aromatic herbs such as fennel, thyme, rosemary. It's planted to Tempranillo with a small percentage of Viura.



Photo: Leah Teschendorff

Harvested by hand, 100% destemmed. Aged 10 months in 500L French oak in the castle cellar. Limited production: Australian allocation 24 bottles.



Smells 'wide', and holds its secrets close. Deep, mysterious, the most red note of the parcela wines - plums and boysenberries, with a touch of pimentón and plenty of fennel in the mix. La Conoca has a wonderfully sophisticated palate with fruit, tannin, spice, fleshiness and earthen tones blending beautifully and resolving with a lovely, lilting sweet-sour ripple.

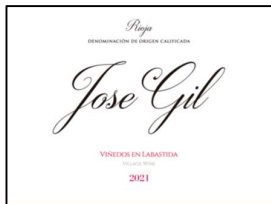
MEANWHILE, in *Otros Pueblos* news ...

As you know from the production notes above, Jose and Vicky have two *bodegas*, one for making, which is in Briones and the ancient San Vicente ageing cave. This *poly-puebloismo* is not just limited to work-spaces; they have made a couple of non-San Vicente village wines. In 2020, there was a one-off from a single vineyard in Briones, probably unlikely to be repeated, but we've kept the note below ... With the 2021 vintage releases, they've slipped out a sneaky little JOSE GIL *Rioja de Pueblo Labastida* 2021. Fruit from a mate of theirs, and a tiny allocation for Australia.

JOSE GIL *Rioja de Pueblo Labastida* 2021

This wine from Labastida is based on two parcels owned by a viticultor friend (Inigo Perea) and a third vineyard which Jose and Vicky rent. In total, there's less than a hectare, just 4km away from San Vicente. It's Tempranillo 90% with Garnacha and various field blend whites. The handling is the

same as for the San Vicente wines; gently aged ten months in large wood in the historical San Vicente cave after concrete fermentation in the Briones facility.



Unmistakeably Jose Gil in style, but a little lighter in carriage, a slightly lower profile in the mouth than the San Vicente wines, but still rounded. Bluebells, cherry medicinal cola, astringent herbs, radish, peppermint and a touch of limestone funk. There's very good movement and energy between fruit and tannin; the wine's shaped like a horizontal disc in the mouth and fresh to finish.

NOTES ON OTHER VINTAGES

The Forthcoming 2022 Vintage – 'Por el Calor'

Due to the heat of the lead-in to 2022's harvest, Jose's intention here is to make easy wines! A short and gentle twelve-day fermentation-maceration was as matter-of-fact as could be. Post-fermentation, 2022s had very little malic acid (this was reported all over Spain during our immediate-post-harvest visits), with malolactic conversion completed in as little as two days. As young wines, the 2022s look great:

Plum flowers, cola, and quite mineral, with some earthiness beneath the purple floral roundness. Fluid, floral, silky, relatively low tannin with a lovely spicy-acid end point. Very San Vicente; very, very Jose Gil.

JOSE GIL vino de pueblo San Vicente 2019

Very approachable, even before decanting. Opens with a deep, bass note perfume of darker flowers (violet, etc), blue fruits and an earthiness that keeps it grounded. Very open, not in a simple way, but rather vibrant with a subtle, strong energy. Middle weight. Classic red and blue fruits, and clear about the garnacha in the mix. Raspberry and damson plum, red and blue. Silky, open weave texture, classy long tannins, super balance. Oak? Didn't notice it. Made with a set (or sets) of very sure, careful hands by the feel of it. (note by TSA guest super-taster, Dave Worthington).

JOSE GIL vino de pueblo San Vicente 2020

Cherry tree boughs, vital, purple fruits, boysenberry, juniper, olive leaves, river silt, warm dry spices, really nicely modulated tannin and fructose, mid weight without heft, savoury but alert. Front loaded with tannin and then releases like spring water.

JOSE GIL Vino de parcela la Canoca (Paraje la Canoja, San Vicente) 2020

Cured meat, game, tomato leaf, brambly, savoury-leaning with a sour-fruit edge. Fine-grained with soft tannins, a little Viura evident? Ripping acidity. (note by Nicola Reid.)

JOSE GIL Vino de parcela 'Camino de Ribas' (Paraje la Cóncova, San Vicente) 2020

Raspberry, blackcurrent compote, forest fruits and a typical touch of sourberry. Fine-grained tannins show subtle chalkiness, staccato and structured. There's a truffle earthiness and fine acid punctuation. (note by Nicola Reid.)

JOSE GIL Vino de parcela el Bardallo (Paraje Bardallo, San Vicente) 2020

Moving more towards red-black from red-blue fruits, deeper and warmer, with a subtle gamey char. Grainy tannins gain a subtle textural lick from a splash of Viura. (note by Nicola Reid.)

JOSE GIL Vino de parcela Viña el Fugas (single vineyard located in Briones)

This is a goblet-planted single vineyard over 100 years old, located in Briones, at an altitude of 550m. Clay soil with calcareous gravels and some vegetation cover crop. Tempranillo, 30% Garnacha and a small percentage of white varieties (Garnacha Blanca, Palomino, Viura ...). Harvested by hand, 100% destemmed. Aged for 10 months in 500L French oak barrels in San Vicente. Bottled in September 2021. Limited production of 650 bottles. Australian allocation 24 bottles.