

## Primitivo Quiles, DO Alicante

### Bodegas Primitivo Quiles

Primitivo Quiles as a bodega and as a family (los Quiles) have been involved with wine in the region since 1780. The bodega is the oldest in Alicante, having been established in 1926. The 'tonnels' (giant old wooden vats such as Tonnel 'Cono 4', after which their delightful rustic house gurgler is named) were built in situ then. The bodega is in Monóvar. The Monovar vineyards are in the Medio Vinalopó, the central run of the river valley (Enrique Mendoza at Villena is north in the Alto Vinalopó), which finishes in the south-east in Bajo Vinalopó at Elche. The nearby hamlet of Raspay, from which they also take fruit and after which their main wine is named, is away from the river valley to the east.

Primitivo Quiles is currently run by the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of men so named. Primitivo Quiles the 4<sup>th</sup> is GM and winemaker, while PQ4's brother Francisco runs export and marketing. In the portrait at top, the Quiles men from left-to-right are Francisco, Primitivo the 3<sup>rd</sup>, now retired, and Primitivo 4<sup>th</sup>.



### DO Alicante

Located in the Autonomous Community of Valencia, down Spain's Mediterranean east coast, DO Alicante produces elegant warm country wines, predominantly dry reds from Monastrell and sweet whites from Moscatel. Vines were introduced to the area by the Phoenicians around 1000BC, and a further influx of vines and wine culture came with the Romans. The region has long benefitted from the manifold Phoenician-Roman gifts of wheat, oil, wine and amphorae.

Alicante is the driest Spanish wine region, with 300mm or so rainfall per year. The winters are short and the summers are long, hot and nearly rainless. High altitude, however, with its dramatic diurnal temperature range, facilitates retention of acidity and the ability to maintain relative delicacy, definition and finesse.

The Alicante DO of around 10,000 hectares (just 55 producers) is divided into two sub-regions: coastal La Marina, just inland from the area's popular beach towns such as Benidorm is home to Moscatel del Mar. Alicante subzone (northwest, inland from the capital, Alicante) is where the Monastrell is grown. The main red wine growing area is the Vinalopó valley at up to 700 metres' altitude. Crop limits are 9.5 tonnes/ha.

Alicante, along with Yecla and Jumilla (DOs further inland) is home to Monastrell (aka Mourvedre in Southern France, where a rather tougher derivative of the variety is grown). Yecla and Jumilla have tertiary soils yielding a sweet, strong, creamy Monastrell. Alicante has several advantages over these. Its poor quaternary soils, its freshening breezes from the sea during summer, and its overall mountainous nature promote fruit with depth of flavour, freshness and finesse at lower alcohol degree than its neighbours. Long, slow ripening, with harvest in mid-to-late October and slow, careful winery elaboration can yield Monastrell wines with great structure *and* freshness.

### Grape varieties in production include:

White: Merseguera, Airen, Macabeo, Verdil, Chardonnay, Moscatel and others.

Red: Monastrell, Garnacha, Garnacha Tintoreira, Tempranillo, Bobal (blech!), Cabernet, Syrah and others.

Quality classifications, along the lines of Rioja are age-based, but rarely feature in reality. Crianza wines are a minimum 24 months of ageing in cellar, including a minimum 6 months in wood. Reservas are 36 months in cellar, including a minimum of 12 on oak, and Gran Reservas are 60 months in cellar with at least 18 in wood.

### Moscatel del Mar, or Moscatel Romano

Elsewhere known as: Muscat of Alexandria, Moscatel de Málaga, Gordo Blanco, Lexia, Moscatel Gordo, and Zibbibo. Moscatel Romano is the common name in the Levante, including DO Alicante, where you may also see it referred to as 'Moscatel del Mar' (as it is predominantly a coastal variety). Throughout history, this variety's affinity with the Mediterranean, combined with the importance of the coastline as a trade route,

and the durability of such wines (thanks to their rich inner fortification via sugar), has made these Moscatels among history's most widely drunk and most important wines.

### Monastrell

Known also as Mourvedre or Mataro, Monastrell is native to the south-east of Spain, in regions like Alicante, Jumilla and Yecla. Old plantings on poor-soiled slopes feature the meat, tar, berry, floral and muscular tannin typical of Mourvedre. It is rather a more successful straight varietal on home turf, however – often showing plentiful red/black berry juiciness which the variety rarely achieves elsewhere.

You will see plenty of skins and tannin in these wines. Their IPT (indication of total polyphenol) is in the 45-60 range, compared to Rioja at around 30). Monastrell has not long been held in high regard, even locally. Once seen (in large part, no doubt, due to the privations and perverse effects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on Spanish regional confidence, economy and outlook) as rustic, oxidative, short-lived and un-special, it is undergoing a significant renaissance. Vigour management is critical, as Monastrell can be cropped at up to 4kg/vine, yielding unexceptional wine. While some have taken an industrial approach to improving quality with technical yeasts, enzyme treatments and so on, reduction of yields is the first and best strategy.

It is rumoured that Monastrell was brought to the area from a mission against the Greeks in 12-13<sup>th</sup> centuries by Corona Aragon (the Aragonese king), who returned to Camp de Morvedre, near Valencia and from here it migrated to the southern Rhone, where it makes rather tougher wines.

### TINTO Cono 4



The big old foudre “Cono 4” is used to age or hold young wines for a few months’ gentle oxidative maturation before bottling. The most recent two vintages are blended, more or less 50-50 to add a degree of complexity and fruit-oxygen tension. The various Conos are measured by the ‘pipas’ – concentric circles which mark the volume in ‘pipes’ of 600 litres, and range between 6000-24000 litres. Bottled in 1 litre baby goons, Cono 4 is a gorgeous rustic house gurgler.

*Brush and cake-fruits, with leather, spice, bricky earth, very neat tannin and surprisingly good fresh (natural) acidity which lengthens the licorice and fennel inflected finish very nicely.*

### Primitivo Quiles ‘Raspay’ Monastrell Tinto Brut Reserva



‘Raspay’ is a town near Monovar (PQ’s winery home), and is home to the family’s original vineyard.

Fermented in large old wood and then aged 24 months in older American oak, this is a much more traditional-oxidative style than common to TSA’s selections. It’s from very old, low yielding bush vines. It’s a fine and quiet wine, driven by woodiness, not just the old wood in which it’s aged, but the wood of the old vines

expressing through the fruit and carrying with it the memory of Mediterranean herbs – sage, black lavender, wild fennel ... and there’s a touch of clovey spice. There’s lovely perfume in the mouth, all savoury and cedary with those dried herbs, and earth. It’s subtle, gentle and fine. It’s also very quirky, and for some will be way too much about oxidative old wood handling, but we think it speaks largely of old school charm.

### Primitivo Quiles ‘Raspay’ Monastrell Tinto Brut Reserva 2010

*Priorat-like in it’s beautiful earth-wood harmony, and featuring a lovely caramelised perfume maturity. Balsamic and pepperminty, with savoury, cedary woodiness and fruity relief - gently earthy red fruits, red apple over bright red cherry. Carries the typical fig-rosemary-date skin markers of Monastrell in a very elegant register with lift from cardamom and rose tea scent. There’s a gorgeous skins perfume mingling, which rises from the mature spreading tannins and the palate is lined by lovely spicy acidity.*

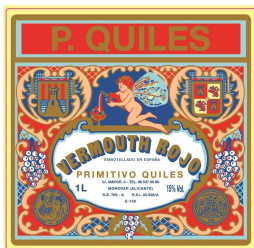
## Primitivo Quiles Moscatel 375ml



A Mistella, it's pressed must and fortifying spirit, leaving 200 grams/litre of residual sugar. Really great as an aperitif/afternoon drink on ice, or with fruit and nut snacks. And a very good cheese wine, thanks to its excellent round, earthily-ripe acidity. There's also a black variant (not currently shipped into Australia) which has a concentrated cooked 'arropé-like' must added to the standard white Moscatel which carries 280 g/l.

*Fragrant, almost headily so – fruity, fresh, floral with some nice wild exuberant earthiness. Smells of oranges, ripe straw, billy tea and raisiny grapiness. Full-bodied, but not too sweet.*

## Primitivo Quiles Vermouth Rojo (1 litre screwcap)



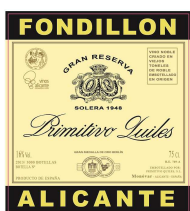
A style first made by the Greeks in the time of Hippocrates, and flavoured by the Italian herb of the same name (Vermouth, that is, not Hippocrates!). PQ have made this wine since the 1920s. It's bottled at 15% alcohol, which is 3% natural from fermentation and 12% of fortification; 9 degrees of potential alcohol are unfermented, realising 150 grams residual sugar.

The wine base is Moscatel, flavoured with aromatic natural herbs – wormwood, sage, fennel, ginger, cardamom and clove. This version is called 'Rojo' as the use of

Arrope (cooked sweet must) gives the vermouth a reddish hue. The Arrope also contributes to the sweetness of the wine.

*Bittersweet and gently herbal with kola bitterness and perfume at back after a softly fruited winey middle. There's some fruit succulence, some tannin chew, and a textural progress from stony, through nutty to bitters. Vermouth of excellent aromatic intensity, balsamic with balancing acidity and a long, intense aftertaste. Great served straight up on tons of ice with citrus slices.*

## Fondillón



An unfortified local specialty wine style. For many years, the local wine, known simply as Alicante, was a radical style, now called Fondillón, a Monastrell-based rancio wine - purposely oxidized and very slightly sweet. It had nearly become extinct but the style has been preserved by half a dozen small family bodegas, particularly Primitivo Quiles. Enrique Mendoza have a new Fondillón solera in development right now. Fondillón is unfortified and barrel-aged at least ten years and often more than twenty before release.

Made since the 1400s, Fondillon was long known simply as Alicante wine. Post-phylloxera, Primitivo Quiles and others making 'table wine', ie dry reds and whites of shorter ageing have necessitated the description as Fondillon, a rancio wine from Alicante, typically made by a version of fractional blending, whereby 1/3 of the wine is removed for bottling annually, and re-topped with reserve wine. Primitivo Quiles are the leading producer among a group of just six Fondillon cellars.

Monastrell can be barrel aged for as little as 10 years and legally be termed Fondillon. However, PQ's date to a pair of Soleras commenced in 1948 and 1892. The base wine is from 60 year old bush vines of Monastrell, picked very late, with a high degree of sugar, such that the fermentation naturally stops at a balance of 16% alcohol and another degree of unfermented sugar, or about 17 grams/litre.

The 1948 Solera is 10 foudre of 1700 litres each, covering 3 age levels. 1/3 only per annum of the oldest foudre is bottled.

The 1892 'El Abuelo' ('grandfather') Solera is a single large barrel from which 100-150 litres are drawn once annually. There were two barrels in the El Abuelo Solera until 1950, when the second was topped up with black Moscatel to become 'Gran Imperial'. It has been topped with Moscatel since. About 150 bottles are released annually. 1948 and 1892 Fondillon Moscatels are topped with minimum 10yo authentic young Fondillon.

### **Primitivo Quiles 'Fondillon Gran Reserva' Solera 1948**

Unfortified, this is just remarkably-managed in the cellar, to end up presenting as a wine of 16% natural alcohol + 60 years' age character, and still beautifully lively, graceful and elegant. It is lightly sweet, rather than a blockbuster PX style. Very long and easy, it is as much suited to drinking as an aperitif/afternoon tipple on ice as it is to the more obvious after-dinner liqueur slot.

*Red fruit tea in a caramelised, developed aromatic cloud, with brilliant volatile touch. The palate has a drying grip after a generous red fruit palate, still varietal and floral. It gently touches all parts of the mouth, wandering low-down, and cleaning up after itself, exiting gently and leaving a salt-spice touch and long deep lingering perfume. Mostly, a tannin-grained essay in textural journeying. Wonderful.*

### **Primitivo Quiles 'Fondillon Vino Nobile Gran Reserva el Abuelo (the grandfather)' Solera 1892**

*Deep and nutty with roasted chestnut and floor polish aromatics, great elegance, lovely earthen astringency.*

### **Primitivo Quiles 'Gran Imperial' Vino Generoso Reserva Especial Solera 1892**

RARE!? There are 102 bottles drawn of this every 2 years; TSA gets just a handful of them. This is a single big barrel which started out as the 1892 Fondillon solera of Monastrell. It was aged as such for 50 years, but since then has spent 50 years being progressively topped with Moscatel EXTRA (a 'black' Moscatel, sweetened and darkened by the addition of Arrope, or cooked must of Moscatel). Deep, long, figgy Monastrell is the spine, with the back half and finish given a sweet coating of dark Moscatel. MAD MAD wine and really, truly great.

*Sweet and fleshy dark muscatel is succulent and wraps all around a palate which has some cream, some nut, rancio and bitters, but as it rolls around in the mouth and unfolds and reveals, at the core a homunculus says "hello, I'm a Monastrell", and you know it hasn't mistaken itself.*