

Zarate Albariños

Rias Baixas (salnes valley)

Zarate Farm

Location terms can be tricky in Galicia, don't rely on your GPS! Zarate is located in the Lugar (a small community, maybe 20 families) of Bouza in the Parochia (ambit of influence of a priest) of Padrenda which is a collection of 10 lugares and about 300 families, in the council of Meaño. I'm worn out just thinking about it! Castro Martin are in the Parochia of Barrantes about 3km to the north in the council of Ribadumia.



Originally Basques from Rioja, the Zarate family came to Cambados (capital of the Salnes Valley wine trade) in 1707. Many generations of mixed farming later, the family estate is now devoted solely to wine. 40 year old Eulogio Pomares and his wife Rebecca Zarate are in charge. Trained at Bordeaux, Eulogio is extremely focused on vineyard management, and is the first organic grower in the region. His grandfather Ernesto was the founder of the annual Cambados Albariño festival in 1953. Eulogio and Rebecca took over in 1999 and have considerably upgraded viti-and-vini-culture.

Zarate farm covers about 10 hectares spread over 12 vineyard parcels on Xabre - a mineral granitic soil giving long ageing potential to the wines. The principal variety planted is Albariño, but they also grow native red varieties Caiño Tinto, Loureiro Tinto and Espadeiro (there are currently 1.5 hectares of Tinto, mainly newly planted).

Zarate viticulture

Since 1994, the Zarate vineyards have been un-tilled, with permanent natural cover (mint, dandelion and a dozen other herbs) and there are no herbicides or chemically synthesised nutrients. The grass is cut for mulch three times/year and no fertilisers are used. New vineyards are composted once with sardines and Atlantic seaweed, and planted to diverse massale selections of quality genetic material from Eulogio's best holdings. Mildew is attacked with rock sulphur in powder and spray form, and a variety of copper formats are applied at extremely low levels to avoid soil toxicity.

While most vines are on American rootstocks, about 15% of their holdings are pre-phyllloxeric (Zarate Estate did not suffer from phylloxera). Ungrafted vines grown on pergolas affect a natural yield limit (and supposedly a corollary quality increment) to about 5 tonnes/hectare, compared to up to 15 t/ha from grafted vines grown on trellises. These old vines have lower PH soils with enhanced calcium (they are old oyster middens!). There are three stands of Pie Franco, most significantly, the Palomar plot adjacent to the bodega, planted in 1850. Palomar vineyard also has a very small amount of ancient Loureiro Tinto and Caiño Tinto which survived phylloxera. Bear in mind that pre-1895 when mildew and phylloxera wiped out 99% of the region, Salnes Valley was 95% Tinto – the main varietal red at the time being Espadeiro, which Zarate are currently re-planting. Eulogio also has his own still on site for making artisanal Aguardiente.

Like most of Salnes, Zarate's vines are planted 'en parra' on granite pergolas about 2 metres above the ground. The use of pergolas to distance the fruit from soil humidity dates since the early 20th century – prior to phylloxera, most vines were traditional Spanish 'en vaso' goblet-pruned bush-vines. Currently, Salnes is planted to around 2500 hectares – this is just 1/10th of the area under vine prior to the advent of phylloxera ... figures consistent with Bierzo, Priorat and many other regions in terms of pre-versus-post phylloxera cropping. Rias Baixas laws allow for yields of 12 tonnes/hectare, but Zarate crop at 6.

Zarate wine-making

Zarate's fruit is hand-picked, typically yielding just 100 gram bunches. The picking process is spread over six weeks from early September. There is bunch selection in the field followed by further bunch and berry selection on sorting table in the bodega to ensure optimally ripe and healthy fruit. The vineyards are picked and fermented separately and then blended as finished wines. About 10-25% of white wine goes through malo, depending upon the conditions of the year.

Until 1999, the wines were fermented in Bocoí – 550 litre Chesnut casks, since then they have been largely made in stainless steel deposits ranging from 300-2000 litres. 90% of wine is Zarate's Estate Albariño, with tiny production quantities of three single vineyard Albariño wines. These three taken together constitute an essay on the textural possibilities of Albariño, exploring the limits of winemaking and texture in this local variety.

Zarate's estate wine is classical in style, based on the granitic soils of Salnes Valley and embracing the pingy acidity of Albariño. It's first big sister, Balado is an enhanced version – the standard model fermented in stainless gets a brief time unstirred on lees for textural richness, and Balado extends this to 6 months. The result is simply a deeper-set, more profound expression of classical Salnes wine, and is entirely consistent with the Estate wine. The other two single vineyards, however, constitute somewhat of a departure. Tras da Vinya is another stainless steel wine, but aged over 2 years on lees, while el Palomar is barrel-fermented.

Zarate Estate Albariño



Produced from vines averaging 35 years old, Zarate's estate wine is based on minerality and acidity, the combination of Salnes valley Granite and Albariño's coastal zip producing a fresh, elegant, balanced wine. The fruit is hand-picked, sorted by the bunch in the vineyard, and then berry plucked in the bodega. Gentle pressing gives a low-yield must which is cold-settled and undergoes natural fermentation, then spends 3 months on lees before filtration and bottling. Eulogio plays with MLF a little for complexity, and on average (there is more need of malolactic fermentation in cold years) about a third of the Estate blend goes through malo. Planting density is 1200 vines/hectare, alcohol 12.7, acidity 7.1 g/l, VA 0.5 g/l, pH 3.0, free SO₂ 22 mg/l, residual sugar 1.6 g/l. 30,000 bottles produced, released as three separate assemblage bottlings in January, June and August.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2015

Punchy nose of lemon drop and green-grassy herbs with a fennel pollen zap! The skinsy component adds a nice fat lemon jube texture without any cloy or caramel. Delicate overall, totally satisfying. Pure Salnes Valley.

ZARATE Albariño 'el Balado' single vineyard



'Balo' in Gallego means wall, like the French term, 'clos'. This tiny granite-walled vineyard of just 0.25 hectares contains two plots which were re-planted to ungrafted material in 1950. South-facing, with shallow poor Xabre sand soils, organically farmed. About 1500 bottles are produced, fermented in stainless as for the Zarate Estate wine, without malo, then given a second ageing of 6 months unstirred in small stainless tank on fine lees, once racked off the gross lees from fermentation. Gently enhanced flesh and textural volume and fine aromatic complexity result. Alcohol 13.6, free SO₂ 34 mg/l, 2600 bottles.

ZARATE Balado Albariño 2015

Steely, mineral, sandy-granitic-smoky to smell, the lemony fruit rings with green herbs, with fennel giving a delicate anise tang. The palate is pepper-grassy and has a wonderful sense of draw in the mouth, gaining an oyster-shell chalkiness as it moves through.

ZARATE Albariño 'Tras da Vinya' single vineyard



Bottled separately since 2004 vintage. 'Tras da Vinya' is a grafted single vineyard of just 0.6 hectares facing south. The vineyard was planted in 1970 with cuttings from the el Palomar vineyard, but on rootstocks and has deeper, richer soil than Balado and Palomar. This wine has a very high malic content due to its sandy soil, is made in stainless steel by spontaneous fermentation.

The wine is racked immediately following fermentation (4 months un sulphured on gross lees), then spends 24 months (more in cold, wet years perhaps) on fine lees, unstirred in tank, with no MLF. 12.3% alcohol, 6.6 g/l total acidity, less than 1.5 g/l residual sugar, 24 mg/l free SO₂, 2600 bottles.

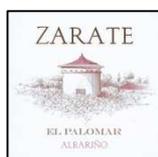
ZARATE Tras da Vinya Albariño 2014

Lemon is filled with mint and other green herbs give the wine an electric tingle. The wine has a quiet and determined line, grassy and delicate it's savoury and really classily textural.

ZARATE Tras da Vinya Albariño 2013

Subtly smoky with a deep solidsy feel due to long lees ageing. There's yellow earthiness, fatly ripe meyer lemons, lemongrass-lime, hay, honeycomb and broader prickly pear fleshiness. Chablis-like in the mouth, it has lovely gentle roundness but great structure and acid line. Savoury, lush and deeply textural, the plush orchard fruits palate is softly spicy with a good chunk of mid-palate chew yet retains a good sense of granitic mineral and varietal acid freshness to finish.

ZARATE Albariño 'el Palomar' single vineyard



Since 2003, 'el Palomar' has been made as a single vineyard wine. Adjacent to the Zarate winery, El Palomar was planted in 1740. It's just half a hectare of 100-200 year-old ungrafted Albariño vines on shallow granite soil over hard granitic bedrock. The roots drill right down into the rock looking for nutrients, and struggle to yield 44 hectolitres to the hectare. De-stemmed, the hand selected berries are slowly, gently pressed then fermented in a single 10-year-old 22 hectolitre round Seguin Moreau Vosges oak vat. It's 6 months on gross lees, unracked and un sulphured, then racked and put back into vat on fine lees for a further 3 months, and malolactic fermentation takes place in vat. There is no battonage. 2600 bottles, bone dry, 13.7% a/v, 26 mg/l free SO₂, 6.9 g/l total acidity, pH 3.3.

ZARATE 'el Palomar' Albariño 2015

With power and precision, this has full on lemon drop streaked with zest and a touch of vanilla richness, puffed rice cereal goldenness is tucked with a green tinge. It has a wonderful satin texture with a fantastic 'pop' at the end.

ZARATE Aguardientes

Eulogio has a tiny distinct bodega with a still in it, license to produce 1000 litres of spirit/year. The result is really clean and pure, making a standard white flame-thrower and a herbal version. The Zarate Hierbas Aguardiente has 12 botanicals including coriander, cinnamon, black tea, mint and saffron to give its pale yellow colour.

ZARATE TINTOS (and other wanderings)



The varietal reds, Caiño Tinto, Loureiro Tinto and Espadairo constitute somewhat of a cultural heritage project, as Zarate have some of the only remnant plantings of these once-dominant local varietals. They are foot-trodden, de-stemmed and open-fermented through 8 weeks, then aged in old 500 litre french oak. Alcohol content in the 11-11.5% range.

ZARATE Espadairo Tinto

ZARATE Espadairo Tinto 2014

Pine resin, mountain firs, stoned cherries (can't tell where the granite ends and the berry begins), a touch gamey and medicinal, agrodulce. Light, complete, open, spicy, dancy ethereal.

Zarate Caiño Tinto

ZARATE Caiño Tinto 2011

Fleshy caponata red fruits, the nose surprisingly rich and seductive. Slicked up with classy oak, but which nevertheless sits entirely within the fruit on the palate. Mouthfeel is very fresh, brisk, with tart fruit skin grip and predictably high coastal acidity.

ZARATE Caiño Tinto 2010

Redcurrant and appleskin, stemmy, nice sour acid, and smoky skins, very agrodulce, light and nimble, not at all oaky.

EULOGIO POMARES WINES

Eulogio Pomares 'grandes Vinos desiguales' maceracion con pieles 2014 vino de mesa

No grape variety allowed on label, fruit from Castrello vineyard, 'la abuela', very near Atlantic Old cider Apple skins, touch of quince, dry honey and wet straw, faded ginger jubes, palate is soft and savoury golden and round with a little stiff chaff in the skins for structure and grip ... Open weave and round, with some pleasing secondary volatiles and controlled phenolics which are surprisingly tucked and faded.

There is also a new (genuine classical style) white, which Eulogio has not yet named and is unsure whether it will appear as a Salnes wine under the Zarate label, or a Vino de Mesa under Eulogio's. fermented in old 550 litre chesnut Bocoï, it's unsulphured, goes through malo and is then racked and rested in Bocoï for a year. Watch this space ...

TASTING NOTES ON OLDER VINTAGES

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2014

Eulogio Pomares has raised a ripper from the Salnes granite in 2014. A waft of the nearby Atlantic adds an entrancing saline line above the granite and below the prickly pear/cut apple fruit. This trio work together perfectly in the mouth as well, with a touch of pearl giving a gurgling, running brook effect.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2013

Honey and light lemon tart lashed with lemon sherbet and a rub of tomato leaf; this is crackling and flinty fine. On the palate field herbs and typical high acidity add fresh lift to serious depth of fruit and lees texture - a beautiful combination with precisely balanced execution. This wine smashes the concept of Albariño as a white to ice and guzzle on a summer's day without a thought.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2012

2012 is a cracker of a white wine year in Spain, and Zarate as good as they get. Highly textural, mineral wine with a gravelly granitic mouth feel overlaid with apple florals and grapefruit zing.

Aromatics and texturality are beautifully matched: pretty and direct jasmine, elderflower, granny smith, green citric zest, sherbety acidity, sandy minerals, a titch of lanolin creaminess and a delicate bitter herb crunch to finish.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2011

Zesty, jumping with floral-apple typical of Salnes. Saline, mineral and subtly skinsy, Palate leads with a really glorious lick of fruit tannin plushness, which releases into a juicy, salivatory acid run. Traces of earthiness spec the bright fruit and it's quietly, sensationally textural.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2009

Slightly deeper, but undiminished lemon-straw colour, fat lemon drop lollies, touch of gingery lime zest, mineral, a touch of saline run. Fuller in mouth with EV Rizz like soft sand and gently degrading yellow skins all soft and squoozy and acid/tannin exo-structure still perfectly in place.

ZARATE Estate Albariño 2005

Shaley and golden, smelling of decomposing old flowers with touches of dry honey, acacia and old wattle. It drinks exactly as it smells, old, golden, drily rich, concentrated and delicious without being overly thick, and good length and freshness.

ZARATE Balado Albariño 2011

Grass, lemon drop, nashi, orange peel, a touch of spice and fresh-cut pineapple, this is replete with the beauty of Albariño fruit expression. It's also wonderfully textural with typical sandy-earthiness and great tension from the interplay between acidic run and lees-aged texture. Extended lees ageing gives richness, but this does not so much divert from Salnes Albariño classicism as texturally enhance it. The underpinning of granitic grippiness in the mouthfeel, along with grassy, sea breeze and mineral aspects are entirely classical – linear with an elevated textural heart, this is an extension of the regular Zarate white, rounded in the middle yet overwhelmingly mouth-watering.

ZARATE Tras da Vinya Albariño 2004

Mid-gold, still with significant green tinges. A golden nose, likewise is shot through with green, grass and herb as well as the powerful and rich fruit character. It's not heavy, nor sweet and there is no sign of phenolic breakdown. Remarkable.

ZARATE 'el Palomar' Albariño 2004

Rindy, old apples fading but still some appeal (this was only the second ever Palomar and the 2200 litre was only second use), rather like 10yo Barossa Semillon.

ZARATE 'el Palomar' Albariño 2002

Stone fruit, golden earth, and blossom of almond and orange. There's a sense of warmth, with clean but very full fruit really nicely gathered around a slender trunk, a through-line of metal/acid/tannin. Good and interesting, this wine has energy, focus, expression and tension.