

Cellar del Roure, DO Valencia – subzone Clariano ‘Terres dels Alforins’

Rare Valencian varieties, carefully made to retain freshness, then aged in *tinajas* in a *bodega fonda* (large clay jars buried in an underground cellar). Below, Pablo Calatayud (with his father Paco).

“*Criat, com es feia abans, en gerres de fang soterrades*”
(raised, as used to be the way, in underground amphorae)

Valencia is a large, diverse, probably meaningless appellation, encompassing orange groves, rice fields, the hot country towns of Utiel and Requena and their blowsy Bobals¹, and several disparate sub-regions. The most interesting of these is Clariano in the hills an hour south-west of sprawling Valencia city. This is where we find Celler del Roure. Their vineyards are in the *pueblo* of Moixent, at 600 metres altitude, nestled under Sierra La Solana. ‘Terres de Alforins’ is an unofficial sub-sub-regional name adopted by several quality producers around the town of Fontanars dels Alforins on the flank of the mountains (a group led by Pablo). Due south across the mountains is the north-western reach of DO Alicante, where lie Pepe Mendoza’s vineyards in Entrena.



Making Valencia Great Again

Apart from being lovely wines, the Celler Del Roure story is one of a return to history.

This area has a near-3000 year culture of winemaking (since the Phoenicians), resulting in a bunch of locally adapted varieties. Until recently, local grapes were all-but abandoned: Verdil blanco and Mandó² tinto were thought extinct. Merseguera white and Arcos red were held in little esteem, barely planted and not given the respect of viticultural care, including modest crop regimes. Looking forward 25 years, Celler del Roure’s most noteworthy wines are now based on these local cultivars. 14 hectares of Mandó and a further 10 of Arcos represent a fair proportion of CDR’s 60 hectares of own vineyards. It has been an impressive transition back to local grapes, requiring great patience and calm commitment.

If one started a wine business in Valencia, the most specific wines possible would be made from locally-evolved grapes, such as Mandó. For these to be characterful and delicious, however, they *must* be grown in a regime of low-cropped mature vines. Otherwise, one would be better served making Valencian wines using more generically regional varieties such as Garnacha and Monastrell.³ Less specific still would be Spanish varieties not native to the Levante (Tempranillo, PX and so on). Still less local, of course would be the use of international varieties, such as Chardonnay.

Predictably, the privations of life under *il Movimiento* led production away from the demands of local varieties. Monastrell and Garnacha yielded more readily, and made better wine quicker when new plantings were required. But non-Levante varieties were even more easily economical, leading to much planting of Spanish and, later, French varieties.

By the time Pablo and Paco Catalayud had purchased the vineyards and winery to found Celler del Roure (in 1996), most of the old and mature vines were *extranjeros*: Chardonnay planted in 1970, PX from the ‘50s. They’ve worked tirelessly since to bring back genuinely local – and delicious! – expressions.



¹ Growers in Utiel and Requena have the option of bottling under DO Valencia, or the more specific DO Utiel-Requena.

² This spelling is *catalan* - in *castellano*, it would be Mandot.

³ Valencia is effectively the ‘hinge’ of Spain’s Mediterranean viticulture, unifying the north’s Garnacha and southern Monastrell. At the same time, it has a food culture which looks both north to Europe and south to Africa.

The Catalayud's aim was to go back up the hill away from fertile soils and back into cultivars as specifically local as it was possible to do so. The first task they set themselves was an audit. An ampelographer was brought in to catalogue their holdings:

"What have we got, what do we want to keep, and do we like where it's planted?"



As a result of the audit, by 1998 they found themselves in possession of two supposedly extinct local varieties: Verdil (a hectare of this white was shared with their neighbour); and Mandó, of which they had, it seemed, the only hectare remaining⁴. These vineyards were kept, and cuttings were taken to graft over, or plant out anew, in a bold commitment to reviving the fortunes of local grapes. In the intervening years, they have sought out other locals, such as Merseguera and Arcos, buying, or renting any existing mature vines of these and planting more. And, for more than 20 years, they have patiently worked towards a day when once again these obscure Valencian varieties would take the foreground. But first, vine age maturity would be needed. They have worked steadily to reverse-engineer their wines, slowly reducing the percentage of French grapes in the mix, then the Spanish, and then even the Levantine, until today when we can enjoy a range of wines driven by local genetics. They are Valencian first, Levantine next (eg, the local Malvasia), Spanish if need be (Garnacha Tintorera, PX), with only a tiny residue of excellent quality 50yo Chardonnay in evidence.

The local varieties have been re-established in plantings dating back to the late 1990s, and are now approaching maturity. Celler del Roure have significant holdings of old vine PX, Malvasia and Chardonnay, and a smattering of old vine Valencian cultivars, significantly the heritage hectare of Mandó. CDR's first production was from vintage 2000. Early on, TSA mate, Sara Perez and her father Josep Lluís Perez (Mas Martinet, Priorat) acted as advisors. They helped optimise the balance between acid retention (inox fermentation) and textural enhancement (batonnage in *anforas*). Viticulture is organic and biodynamic, save for a couple of rented parcels. They have agreements with six local growers who have 12 hectares of indigenous varieties: these are generously paid by the hectare, so that they are not tempted to produce excess kilos.

Wines made in mud

As well as bringing back Verdil, Merseguera, Mandó and Arcos, the Catalayud's have also re-instated ageing in clay. Apart from the aberrant 20th century, Valencia and Alicante share a long historical legacy of fermentation and ageing in *anforas* (amphorae). Pablo and Paco's *bodega fonda* (underground winery) was first excavated 300 years ago and houses buried terracotta *anforas* ranging from 600-2800 litres. Abandoned in the dark days of 1930s Spain, the Catalayuds are busy renovating these historical clay jars. Of 97 ancient pots, 20 have been dug out, renovated and re-buried in the cellar's *aglomerado* soil – a sand, limestone, chalk, clay mix. *Anforas* mimic the maturation effects of barrel-ageing without adding oak flavour or de-acidifying the wine.



⁴ Since then, it has also been found in Galicia.

Celler del Roure 'Cullerot' Verdil blanco blend

'Cullerot' is a tadpole in *valenciana* (the local variant of *catalan*), and symbolises the Catalayud's desire to "grow and improve" (from a tadpole to something more) in their quest to "elaborate interesting white in a red wines land". First released in 2010, it's a multi-varietal blend of Verdil, Merseguera, Malvasia, Macabeo, PX and Chardonnay. The PX is 70 years old, the Chardonnay 50, the Verdil and Malvasia are 30. Verdil, Macabeo and Chardonnay grow in limestone sand, with Malvasia, PX and Merseguera in clay loam.

The fruit is de-stemmed and fermented as separate varieties in inox, then blended and aged six months in *anforas*. Maturation in clay gives an open, mature texture, without obvious clay flavour, nor any oxidative loss of natural acid freshness.



Fresh Mediterranean: delicious, calm and gentle.

Apple blossom and golden paddock florals, with pear, salty quince and a green herb hint of young fennel. With touches of honey, stone, anise and straw, it's deft, not heavy. The mouth has good volume and ends neatly, edged by bay bitters and spice, fruit skin and a touch of steely mineral.

The Mandó Tintos: Celler del Roure 'Parotet', Safrà and 'Vermell'

Mandó (in *valenciana*, or Mandot in *castellano*) is a Valencian autochthon, thought extinct until ampelographers identified a single hectare of Mandó in 1998 (it was recognised in the register of grape varieties in 2011). Mandó is low in colour, light-skinned with very good acidity, and is well-suited to make fresh wines in warm climates. It's tight bunches are sensitive to rot and botrytis, requiring a fair degree of viticultural commitment. CDR have been over-grafting Mandó onto existing old vine roots since identification, and have also initiated new plantings in 2000 and 2013.

Winemaking for the Mandó blends is very subtle. Skins extract work is very moderate, with 3-5 days on skins at most (much of the Vermell material only has a day of maceration and drinks like a super rosado). Fermentation is gentle and acid-retentive in stainless steel. Thus protected, the wines then open up underground ageing in clay, the duration of which is matched to the weight of each wine.

The Mandó wines increasingly feature a blend element of another local red cultivar, Arcos. Arcos is also a saved local variety, once virtually planted out in favour of easy-yielding French cultivars. Like Mandó, Arcos is a fresh, elegant, delicate variety, light in colour and aromatic, albeit with more tannin power. Arcos is a late ripener, with a very long maturation cycle. It has large bunches of large, strong-skinned berries. For several years now, the Calatayud family have been grafting Arcos onto old vines from 1970. They now own 10 hectares of it, plus renting five hectares which were the last Arcos vines standing before the reclamation began.

Flavour and texture development with vine age in the Mandó Tintos

Across the three wines, vine age expresses as a differential cherry progression, from sour little red cherries, through Morellos and into juicy blacks. Corresponding changes occur in herb expression, from rosehip, down into lantana and finally briar. And the tannin profile gets deeper, more earthen-fleshy with vine age. Low glycerol levels allow the tannin to run the show while dancing between powdery and leathery, and the fruit always has a subtle, delicious sour nip at the edge.

Three expressions are made and the colour of their labels is directly expressive of colour saturation and tannin presence in the wines thanks to vine age:

- a red-spectrum young vines wine is called 'Vermell', referring to the local red dirt (similarly to the *Call Vermell* of Mallorca). The delicate, low-tannin young vine fruit which goes into Vermell is supported by a highly compatible partner, the delicate, red floral fruitiness of Garnacha Tintorera (Alicante Henri Bouchet).
- in 1998, Mandó cuttings from the heritage vineyard on which Parotet is based were grafted onto the roots of a Chardonnay vineyard planted in 1970. This vineyard now has old vine

roots with mature vine tops. For the first years of Safrà (2015 on), the Mandó was supported by compatibly weighted and scented Garnacha Negra. From 2018, however, the Mandó is deemed mature enough to run the show on its own and is now chaperoning a little of the local Arcos into view for the first time.

- and there is the deep licorice and cassis blue-black genetic heritage old vines wine, Parotet. Again, the sensitivity, intelligence and patience of the Catalayud's method of bringing these local grapes back is palpable. At first, while they worked to understand Mandó, Monastrell was viewed as a compatible structural crutch for the old vines. But now, it's all local, Mandó and a rapidly increasing ratio of Arcos.

Celler del Roure 'Vermell' Garnacha Tintorera-Mandó blend

30% Mandó, 70% Garnacha Tintorera grown at 550 metres. 70% de-stemmed, 3-5 days maceration, fermentation in stainless, 4 months in clay. Just 12% abv.



It's all bright, buzzy and electric-energetic, red currant, barberry and pomegranate in red dirt. Light cherry sweetness settles into the savoury spread of cola root, earthen tannin, and dotted with soft, dry earthen spices. Beautifully balanced on fine natural acid. Incredible wine for the money, it's light, savoury and stylish, finishing chalky and herbal. A banging Big Rosie!

Celler del Roure 'Safrà' Mandó

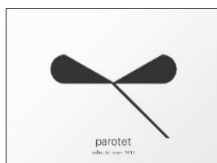
4 ha of 20 year-old plantings selected from Parotet: the saved, now-mature rebirth of Mandó. 30% whole bunch, 12 days maceration, fermentation in stainless, 6 months lees-ageing in 2800 litre 'mud jars'. Slow, gentle elaboration yields a fluid, lively Mandó. It's named for saffron, and references Southern Mediterranean Spain's connection with Northern Africa as much as Europe.



More herbal-vegetal than Vermell, still in a red fruit-and-earth spectrum. It's brightly red and floral without any annoying fruitiness. An open cherry-sarsaparilla herbal wine and a touch saline. Has hints of saffron, turmeric, fennel pollen, sage and quinine bark. The mature vines yield a savoury, leathery tannin of great poise without impact, and with gentle acidity. This is a pure and free wine of spice, space and poise - just let it happen.

Celler del Roure 'Parotet' Mandó

Parotet is old vine Mandó, with some Arcos. Spontaneous indigenous yeast fermentation in stainless, 20 days maceration before racking for malolactic and ageing on lees in amphorae. 10 months underground in 2,600l clay gives earthen grip in a mature and open tannin profile without any wood reducing its freshness. 13% a/v. 20 hl/ha yield. 'Parotet' is *valenciana* for dragonfly.



Cassis, beets and cranberry with a touch of game and clovey spice, yet Parotet remains in the herb-floral energetic world of its little sisters. Elegant and balanced, it is savoury with nice sweet acid freshening gentle spicy tannin roundness. Working easily around the tannin, it's a wine of gentle movement. Mid-weight with tonnes of character, genuinely interesting, and delicious.

Celler del Roure 'les Prunes' Blanc de Mandó vi verge (virgin wine/blush de noir)



A blush Mandó called 'les Prunes', from 100% free run. The early harvest juice was virtually white, and the pinkish hue in the textured, acid-electric finished wine is from controlled oxidation in large *anfora*. It starts fermentation in stainless and finishes in the buried clay. It's labelled as a white, yet it's made from red grapes. It looks like a rosat, and feels like a skin contact wine, but is in fact a 'vi verge' – virgin juice run off before pressing. Red grapes give a jagged white wine-like tannin.

It's called 'les Prunes' for the lovely smell of not-yet-ripe wild plums on a summer evening ... the smell, more or less, of when you want to drink it! 'Les Filles d'Amalia' are the daughters of Pablo's mother, Amalia, Pablo's sisters.

Pomelo, strawberry flowers, cherry and orange rind with an open flowing movement, chalky tannin-phenolic edge and a saline touch. The finish whips into line with a slight astringent wiry-wild thyme hit and grape fruit acidity. It's light-bodied, wild but fresh and pretty.

The wonderful labels are the work of Valencian graphic artist, Dani Nebot:

http://www.danielnebot.com/Dani_Nebot/home.html



DO VALENCIA

The Denominació de Origen (in Valenciana, a Catalan variant) is south from Barcelona along the Mediterranean coast. Inland from the Mediterranean, the climate tends towards a moderate-continental climate, both hotter in Summer and daytime and cooler in Winter and the night than the balmy coastal conditions. Soils in the better region are sandy and limey.

The DO was constituted in 1957, and covers around 18,000 hectares (not all under vine), and regulates around 80 bodegas in production of table wines.

There are several zones: Alto Turia, Vanentino, Moscatel de Valencia, and Clariano in the south-west, which is home to Celler del Roure. 'Terres dels Alforins', as the Catalayuds label the Celler del Roure wines, is not an official sub-zone, but rather their own "sub"-sub-zone designation indicating a level of local specificity that the broader zonal designations do not capture. As Pablo puts it, "Terres dels Alforins" is a loosely put together local organization to promote our corner of the Clariano zone which comprises of three villages and the land in between. We invented this to promote our wines and area for wine tourism and identity as Clariano covers a relatively large area in which the wines are quite different."

Valencia is also home to economically important agriculture in the form of orange and rice growing.

PERMITTED GRAPES

White: Merseguera, Malvasía, Pedro Ximénez, Moscatel Romano, Planta Fina, Macabeo, Chardonnay, Planta Nova, Tortosí, Verdil, Sauvignon Blanc, Sémillon

Red: Monastrell, Garnacha Tintorera, Garnacha, Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir, Arcos, Forçay, Bobal, Syrah

Verdil has medium sized berries in compact bunches, and makes whites with medium body, fruity and aromatic. Until recently, almost extinct.

Merseguera is a more commonly planted white grape (around 4,000 hectares total production), and adapts to make balanced, if rarely inspiring wines in the warmth of the Levant. Well adapted to dry, poor soils.

Mandó is very little known: until recently, just the 1 hectare of Parotet was on record as being planted in all of Spain. There is speculation that Graciano is a part of its genetic parentage, a case which makes at least surface-level sense based on its ability to produce red wines of medium body with good natural acid freshness. Known as Mandón in Galicia and planted a little in Arribes del Duero. In *castellano*, Mandó would be written Mandot.

Garnatxa Tintorera is better known as the French hybrid, Alicante Henri Bouschet, GT or simply Tintorera is planted in Galicia and Valencia, and Portugal's southern Alentejo. Red fleshed, prolific in yield, soft and fruity, perhaps only rarely interesting.

Arcos is a saved local variety, native to the Alcusses valley. It was nearly abandoned in favour of easy-yielding French cultivars. Like Mandó, Arcos gives fresh, elegant, delicate wines, light in colour and aromatic, albeit with more tannin power. Arcos is a late ripener, with a very long maturation cycle. It has large bunches of large, strong-skinned berries. For several years the Calatayud family have been grafting Arcos onto old vines from 1970. They now own 10 hectares of it, plus renting the original 5 hectares which were the last Arcos vines standing before the reclamation began.