



**August, 2019
Volume XX**

My first selection for this quarter is from one of the vanguard wineries of the Ribera del Duero, the **2016 Emilio Moro Ribera del Duero "Malleolus" (\$59)**. During the genesis of my education of Spanish wines in the early 1990's it was the wines of Vega Sicilia, Pesquera, and Emilio Moro who shaped my opinion of this complex region. I also benefited from spending three days there in 2007, visiting up-and-coming properties who today are counted among the region's superstars. Today there are dozens of estates that I enjoy from the Ribera del Duero, but there are few whom I hold in the highest regard I reserve for Emilio Moro. It is a delight to bring you this one, which is one of the most important wines produced in the region. To my surprise, it is also the first true Ribera del Duero to be featured in this club.

When it comes to Spanish wines, most consumers are familiar and comfortable with those of the Rioja region. Less well known in my opinion are the wines from the Ribera del Duero DO. This sprawling zone begins in the Picos de Urbion Mountains of north/central Spain. It winds westward past the city of Valladolid, across the country through the wine regions of the Ribera del Duero, Rueda and Toro before crossing the border into Portugal. On the Spanish side the growing conditions are classified as high desert, with vineyards lying between 2100 and almost 4000 feet in elevation. Ribera del Duero also has a unique climate, with both Mediterranean and Continental tendencies including a short but very hot summer. During my visit in late April, the vines were just finishing their dormant period and looked like short, dark hands sticking out of the dirt, fingers extended to the sky. By contrast, I arrived next in Rioja where the vines were already covered with leaves. Both regions harvest at about the same time, October, so you can see how fast the growing season is in this area.

The other thing that is striking about most old Spanish vineyards is the low density planting. Due to the nutrient poor soils and lack of water, most old vineyards are planted to less than 800 vines per acre. This allows each plant to develop large root systems to extract as much nourishment from the soil as possible without competition from other vines. Nonetheless, each vine naturally produces only a few clusters of grapes, so yields are very low compared with most modern wine regions.

One of the great challenges for producers in the Ribera del Duero is that their wine history is very old, with archeological evidence showing wine production in the region 2600 years ago, but their modern market is relatively young. The Denominación de Origen (DO) was formed only in 1982 and, incredibly, there were only nine wineries producing estate bottlings at the time. At that time, most of the vineyard owners sold their grapes to local cooperatives who produced wine for local consumption. Visionaries such as Alejandro Fernandez of Pesquera encouraged growers to produce their own wines after the DO was awarded. Despite being a vast region with several different climates, the Ribera del Duero has no official sub-zones like Rioja and Priorato. This is because in Spanish wine law the region must be classified as DOP, Denominación de Origen Calificada, for which it was approved in 2008 but never pursued the requirements to finish. As a result, some producers have taken it upon themselves to market their wines as "single vineyard" or defining them as single zone, but this is done without official classification.

This is the case for our feature this quarter- the Malleolus is produced from parcels within a single vineyard, planted in 1932 by Don Emilio Moro. His son, also Don Emilio, would inherit his father's passion for their vineyards and carried on expanding their holdings, but it was not until 1989 when the third generation would officially begin bottling wine under their own label. At that time José Moro, Don Emilio's son, recognized the potential for their wines in the world marketplace and created a distribution network. My first exposure to their wines was in the mid-1990's during a tasting with Jorge Ordóñez, when he first introduced them to the US market. I remember thinking how concentrated and powerful the wine was, yet boasting a level of polish rare for the area. It was also a relative bargain compared to Vega Sicilia and Pesquera, selling for less than \$20.

To make this wine the Moros exclusively use Tempranillo, from blocks that range from twenty-five to seventy-five years old. All of the grapes are hand harvested, then destemmed and fermented in stainless steel tanks, then left on the skins for eighteen days. After the wine is dry it is moved to new French barriques, where it ages for eighteen months. You will want to decant this wine for at least one hour, and up to two before serving. Once you do it offers a reticent nose of black figs, milk chocolate, black cherry jam, tobacco, sage and new ball mitt on the nose. On the palate it is quite dry and the wood is obvious, providing a fair amount of tannin into the finish. I tasted a half-dozen Ribera del Duero wines one afternoon looking for the right one for our feature and this one stood out as being the only example in this price range that was not excessively overripe. Because of this I think it needs some time, but will drink well over a long period of time, from 2023 to 2036.

The second selection for this quarter was a standout wine for me during my visit to Bordeaux in April, the **2016 Chateau le Thil Comte Clary Pessac-Leognan (\$55)**. I have become a big fan of this category over the past few years as the wines display an impressive amount of power as well as smooth, supple tannins. This wine is a nice foil to the rather tannic Ribera del Duero above and will give you something to enjoy as that wine settles down a bit.

The area where this vineyard is located has one of the oldest histories of grape growing in Bordeaux. Walking through the vineyards with a guide, they show where Roman ruins exist from 2000 years ago. At one point it was also part of the vineyards of Chateau Smith Haut Lafitte, who trace their history of winemaking back into the middle 1300's. It remained attached to Smith Haut Lafitte until the 1950's but they leased the vineyards used to make this wine to Chateau Carbonnieux. Then in the 1970's the property was inherited by the de Laitre family. In 1990 Jean de Laitre began a process of replanting and also changed the name, adding Comte Clary to the Chateau le Thil in order to avoid confusion with another chateau. In 2002 Carbonnieux purchased the vineyards they were leasing but not the winery or cellars. At that point de Laitre renovated the cellars and began producing wine. Although not well known to casual consumers, Bordeaux insiders consider this a sleeper property producing incredible quality for less than their more famous neighbors.

What Jean de Laitre recognized in the late 1980's, as the Bordeaux market began to rapidly expand, is the exceptional terroir of this estate. The vineyards are located in the commune of Martillac, situated between chateaus Carbonnieux,, Bouscaut and Smith Haut Lafitte. This is the southern most and closest to the river area of Pessac-Leognan, so it is slightly cooler than properties closer to the city. It is also an area with a slightly higher clay content in the otherwise extremely gravelly soils, which helps to further build texture in the final wine. For this reason, de Laitre uses an extremely high planting density, between 2,800 and 4,000 vines per hectare, to naturally reduce crop yield through root competition. The property has roughly thirty five acres of vines, of which twenty-eight are dedicated to red varieties.

When doing my research for the write up I was surprised to learn that this property does not grow any Cabernet Sauvignon, with the blend being roughly eighty percent Merlot and twenty percent Cabernet Franc. They grew Cabernet Sauvignon until the 2013 vintage, when it was determined it did not ripen adequately to produce the caliber of wine they are shooting for.

Winemaking is directed by Stephane Deroncourt, who consults for one hundred and forty wineries world wide, including some of the biggest names in Bordeaux. All of their grapes are hand harvested and destemmed before undergoing alcoholic fermentation in stainless steel tanks, left on the skins for twenty-eight days. At that point the Merlot is racked to 100% new French oak barrels, where it undergoes malolactic fermentation and is left on the lees for three weeks. The Cabernet Franc is fermented the same way but undergoes malolactic fermentation in one-year-old barrels. The blend is made after the first racking then left in fifty percent new oak barrels for eighteen months.

When you are ready to serve this wine, decant it for an hour before serving. Then it offers up a surprisingly lively bouquet of fresh red cherries, claro cigar wrapper, pain grille, blood orange peels and wet black slate. On the palate it is very smooth and polished, with faintly gritty tannin rising on the finish but not oppressing the wine. Drink 2022-2029.

My final selection is a wine that came out of left field a few weeks ago during a tasting with one of my Italian suppliers. At that point I was hoping to present a world class Greek wine for this selection, but this wine is such a winner that I decided to postpone that feature until later.

My final selection, the **2013 Cafaggio Basilica del Cortaccio (\$52)**, is a rarity for a number of reasons, and not just that I chose it despite being 100% Cabernet Sauvignon! Of course I am kidding, but this wine is unique in that it is produced from vineyards just south of the town of Panzano, in the heart of the Chianti Classico district. It is exceptionally rare because this region, known as the Conca d'Oro, is the home of some of the greatest Chianti Classico estates where Sangiovese is king.

Like almost all properties in this part of Tuscany, there is a long history of winemaking. The first record of Villa Cafaggio goes back to 1406 and records winemaking and olive oil production. Throughout the centuries the property has changed hands many times but in the 1960's came under the ownership of Farkas family. At that time the property was in ruins and they began an extensive rebuilding and replanting program. Today the estate has one hundred and fifty acres of vines and nearly fifty more acres of olive trees. Although no longer owned by the Farkas family, their quality-centered vision remains the focus of this dynamic estate.

To make this wine they use only grapes growing in a tiny ten acre parcel that lies on extremely gravelly, limestone rich soils. Again, vine density is quite high at 2,800 vines per acre, so yields are very low. In the scorching growing conditions of 2013 the vines struggled and yields were even lower than normal. All of the grapes are hand harvested, destemmed and fermented in stainless steel tanks for twenty days. The wine was then racked to French oak barriques for malolactic fermentation and aging for eighteen months.

When you are ready to serve this wine you will want to decant it for a half-hour before serving. The bouquet is one of dried sweet cherries, black raspberry jam, dried thyme, bay leaf and balsamic macerated strawberries. On the palate it is quite intense and focused, with dry tannins pushing into the fruit early, but mellowing near the finish. Drink this wine from 2019 to 2029.