



Tim's Wine Market

April 2024

By J.P. Donnelly-Davis

In September 2023, my wife Susan and I took a trip to Spain with one of my suppliers, visiting a number of properties, some new and others already known. These trips are always important as we visit some amazing people and see their passion first-hand. As you already know, telling their stories is in the DNA of TWM and it is always a joy to bring their wines back to you. This month the first two wines have finally arrived and I could not be more excited to present them to you. While I handed off the majority of the writing to JP this month due to time constraints, I have injected some personal notes about these properties in *italics*. - **Tim**

Telmo Rodriguez “Al-Muvedre” Monastrell 2018 - \$16

Even though Telmo Rodriguez is most famous for his wines from the Rioja region, where he runs his family winery Remelluri, he met my group in Madrid at Club Matador. This is a club that Telmo founded with the mission to enrich the cultural environment of Madrid and Spain in general. We first chatted in the bar, which serves over 300 different Sherry, curated by Telmo of course, then enjoyed a leisurely lunch tasting many of his side projects. While all his wines are outstanding I was particularly struck by this Monastrell, a variety that many produce but few master.

When we talk about “modern” Spanish wine and the renaissance of terroir and traditional viticulture, it is difficult not to mention our friend Telmo Rodriguez. In the 30+ years since the founding of his company, Telmo has championed organic and biodynamic viticulture, revitalized abandoned vineyard sites, and traveled across Spain as a winemaking consultant. Throughout all this, he has retained his commitment to terroir and the native grape varieties of Spain, many of which were long thought forgotten. This month, we are looking to the seaside region of Alicante, where the winemaking history dates back to the pre-Roman era, and to one of Spain's oldest and most significant grape varieties.

Alicante has been a hub of maritime trade since at least 1000 BC, when Greek and Phoenician traders introduced their wares to the native Iberian tribes. This included iron, the wheel, and perhaps most critically, the grape vine. Throughout the Roman period, the region became a hub of commercial winemaking, much of which came to a halt during Moorish rule. In the 13th century, the port of Alicante was re-captured by the Spaniards, and for nearly 800 years has been an important exporter of wine, olive oil, and textiles.

Like many of Spain's coastal growing regions, the climate in Alicante is hot for most of the year with very little rainfall. The maritime influence and arid climate create the ideal growing conditions for production of the Mourvedre grape, known locally as Monastrell. Many of the region's vineyard sites are upwards of 100 years old, and a few even feature ungrafted pre-phylloxera vines due to the region's sandy soils, which prevent the spread of root lice and other pests. All fruit used in this wine comes from bush vines planted in marco real, a grid-shaped pattern of vine training which today designates older vines in some parts of Spain. At over 80 years of age, these vines are producing smaller quantities of fruit, which naturally leads to higher concentration and fruit quality. Interestingly enough, this wine is one of his only bottlings that uses purchased fruit. Telmo attempted to buy the vineyard land, and though the current owner was reluctant to part with it, they were able to reach an agreement in order to produce this historically significant wine.

When you open this wine, you will want to decant for up to half an hour. In addition, you will want to serve this wine closer to cellar temperature, around 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit. Once this wine has some time to acclimate to cellar temperatures, it displays an impressive bouquet of blackberry preserve, black cherry, crushed blackcurrant, violet petal, pipe tobacco, and black pepper. Drink now through 2028 with chicken and rice dishes, smoked meats such as brisket and sausage, or chill it a bit more and serve with grilled salmon and potatoes!

Bodegas Tabula “Damana” Ribera del Duero 2020 - \$28

The first two nights of our trip we stayed in the city of Valladolid, a regional capital close to the Rueda, Toro, Cigales and Ribera del Duero wine regions. Our first day touring wineries we visited Rueda, Toro and Cigales and on the second day we began moving east down the Douro River towards Penafiel on a stretch of road called the La Milla de Oro, or the Golden Mile. As we passed Vega Sicilia, Spain's most famous winery, I was surprised when we only traveled

a couple of minutes more and pulled into our appointment at Bodegas Tabula. This is a new winery run by Jose Luis Muñoz, a fanatical perfectionist who is making big impressions in the Spanish wine market with his wines. I often find the wines of Ribera de Duero to be a little homogenized but tasting at Tabula was quite eye opening.

The autonomous community of Castilla y Leon contains many of Spain's most established growing regions, including one of the country's most critically acclaimed red wine appellations, Ribera del Duero. The Duero river originates in Castilla y Leon and flows west through northern Portugal, where it is called the Douro, before reaching the Atlantic. On the Spanish side of the river the dominant variety is Tinto Fino, the local clone of the Tempranillo grape. Although today it is impossible to imagine Ribera del Duero wines centered around any other variety, prior to the late 1970s there was very little estate bottled wine here, with most wine produced by co-ops for local consumption. Though some Tempranillo was grown, it was often blended with other varieties such as the early-ripening, high yielding Bobal. This all began to change in the late 1970s, when Alejandro Fernandez produced the first varietal bottling of Tempranillo in what would soon become the Ribera del Duero denomination. From only a handful of founding producers in 1982, today there are over 200 independent wineries in Ribera del Duero, and Tempranillo has become the region's dominant grape variety.

One such property is Bodegas Tabula, founded in 2002 by winery owner Jose Luis Muñoz. Having worked in the agricultural sector for many years, Jose Luis understands the importance of terroir and the micro-climates found throughout the region. In addition, the winery uses a blend of modern and traditional viticultural methods, such as whole cluster fermentation. For this Crianza, the fruit is harvested by hand and fermented in large wooden vats. After 12 months of oak maturation the wine is bottled for release the following year.

When you open this wine, I strongly suggest decanting for at least half an hour. In addition, this wine benefits from being served at cellar temperature, about 55-60 degrees Fahrenheit. Once this wine has a chance to open up it delivers notes of black raspberry, cooked blueberry, caramel, vanilla, and toasted fennel seed. Drink now through 2028 with grilled sausages with paprika, white bean soup, or pork empanadas.

Spanish Tortilla

In America we think of eggs as a breakfast food, but in many cultures they are an essential protein eaten throughout the day. In Spain one of the most common dishes is Tortilla, which bears no resemblance to those of Latin America. Think of Tortilla Español as an omelet with potatoes and just about anything else you care to add. For this version I used fried, cured chorizo to add a bit more weight, making it perfect for either wine selection.

8 oz cured chorizo sausage (not fresh)

1¹/₄ pounds potatoes, 3 or 4 medium

1 medium onion

1 cup olive oil, divided

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

6 extra-large or jumbo eggs

Slice the chorizo into 1/4 inch thick coins and fry in an 8- or 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat. Turn after 4-5 minutes and continue cooking until they are crispy, roughly another 4-5 minutes. Remove from sausage from the pan but leave the oil they render. Add 2/3rds of cup of olive oil to the skillet.

Peel and thinly slice potatoes and onions; it's easiest if you use a mandoline. Heat the oil until it ripples and drop in a potato slice.

When tiny bubbles appear around its edges, add potatoes, onions, a good pinch of salt and a liberal sprinkling of pepper. Gently turn mixture in oil with a wooden spoon, and adjust heat so oil bubbles lazily.

Cook, turning potatoes gently every few minutes, until they are tender when pierced with a small knife. Adjust the heat so they do not brown. If potatoes begin to break, they are overdone; stop cooking immediately. As potatoes cook, beat eggs with some salt and pepper in a large bowl.

Drain potatoes in a colander, reserving oil. Wipe out skillet, and heat over a medium flame for a minute. Add 2 tablespoons oil. Gently mix warm potatoes and sausage with eggs, and add to skillet. As soon as edges firm up, after a minute or so, reduce heat to medium-low. Cook 5 minutes.

Insert a rubber spatula all around edges of tortilla to make sure it will slide from pan. The top will still be runny. Carefully slide out onto a plate. Cover with another plate, and holding plates tightly, invert them. Add another tablespoon oil to skillet, and use the spatula to coax tortilla back in. Cook 5 minutes, then slide from skillet onto a clean plate. Serve warm (not hot), or at room temperature.