



ERIC SOLOMON SELECTIONS

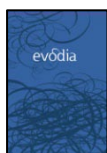
PLACE OVER PROCESS

Stephen Tanzer's
INTERNATIONAL WINE CELLAR

November/December 2010
Best New Releases from Spain
By Josh Raynolds

CATALUNYA – Priorat & Beyond

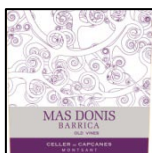
SUPER SUPER VALUES (under \$15)



2009 Altvinum Evodia Calatayud

90

(\$12; 100% garnacha; all stainless steel) *Sexy, high-pitched aromas of strawberry preserves, black raspberry, minerals and pungent flowers. Concentrated but not at all heavy; sweet raspberry and blackberry flavors are lifted by a hint of violet. Very suave, especially at this price; finishes with silky tannins and excellent clarity. No jamminess here, which is pretty rare for inexpensive garnacha.*



2008 Celler de Capcanes Mas Donis Barrica Montsant

89 (+?)

(\$13; 85% garnacha del pais and garnacha peluda and 15% syrah, aged in a combination of new and older French and American barriques Ruby-red. *Deep, youthfully bound-up aromas of blackberry, cassis, licorice and woodsmoke. Chewy dark fruit flavors show very good depth, complemented by notes of tarragon and candied violet. Slow to reveal itself, but the fruit is plenty deep; the finish closes with impressive thrust and dusty tannins.*

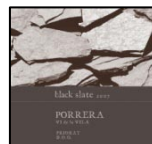


2009 La Cova dels Vins Ombra Montsant

90

(\$14; 45% each of garnacha and samso and 10% cabernet sauvignon) *Bright red. Lively aromas of black raspberry, minerals, flowers, camphor and spicy oak. Energetic, bright and sweet, with lovely spicy lift to flavors of red berry preserves, herbs and mocha. Offers impressive balance and energy, with no rough edges, finishing tangy, focused and long, with delicate tannins.*

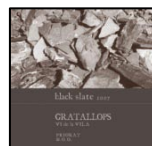
PRIORAT (under \$50)



2008 Black Slate Porrera Priorat

90

(\$20; 60% garnacha and 40% carinena) *Deep ruby. Pungent dark fruits and smoky minerals on the nose, with a hint of dried flowers adding complexity. Then brighter in the mouth, offering dense, sweet black raspberry and bitter chocolate flavors and a late note of zesty minerality. Rich but animated, with very good finishing clarity and cut.*



2008 Black Slate Gratallops Priorat

91

(\$20; a blend of garnacha, cabernet sauvignon, merlot and syrah) *Bright ruby-red. More aromatic than the Porrera, with scents of redcurrant, raspberry and spicecake and a suave rose note. A spicy, penetrating midweight that offers sweet red and dark berry flavors and strong mineral spine. Fine-grained tannins add grip and shape to a long, juicy finish. I prefer this wine's extroverted, perfumed personality to that of the denser Porrera, but I bet the earlier wine will age longer, not that it matters, since this one is delicious now.*

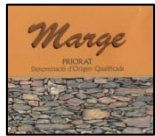


2007 Celler Cal Pla Mas d'En Compte Tinto Priorat

91(+?)

(\$30; 50% garnacha, 45% carinena and 5% cabernet sauvignon) *Vivid ruby. A complex bouquet offers raspberry, cherry compote, potpourri and spicecake. Deeper, darker fruits on the palate, along with suggestions of allspice and vanilla. Shuts down with air and shows fine-grained tannins and good mineral spine, suggesting the wine needs a little more patience. The finish is taut and focused, with a lingering touch of bitter licorice and very good persistence.*

PRIORAT (under \$50) *continued*



2008 Celler de l'Encastell Marge Priorat

90

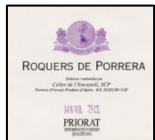
(\$28; 60% garnatxa, with merlot, cabernet sauvignon and syrah) Bright ruby. Fresh red fruit and floral aromas are given depth by suggestions of licorice and black cardamom. Spicy, sweet and incisive, with very good clarity and a snap of minerality. Open-knit and very attractive, with strong finishing cut and a lingering note of raspberry. There's a light touch to this wine that reminds me of pinot noir.



2007 Celler Mas Doix Salanques Priorat

91

(\$30; 65% garnacha, 15% carinena, 10% syrah and 5% each of merlot and cabernet sauvignon) Glass-staining ruby. An intensely perfumed bouquet of crushed red berries, smoky herbs, potpourri and minerals. Lively raspberry and cherry flavors are underscored by tangy minerality and pick up deeper notes of licorice and mocha in the mid-palate. Leaves a trail of juicy red fruit and spice notes behind a nicely persistent, energetic finish. I'd drink this now for its energy and zesty fruit. Note that the price for the excellent 2006 version was \$50.



2007 Celler de l'Encastell Roquers de Porrera Priorat

91

(\$40; 80% garnatxa and carinena and 20% merlot and syrah) Deep ruby. Lively and precise on the nose, offering ripe red fruit, floral qualities and a slow-building herbal essence. Much darker in profile on the palate, offering dense cherry and plum flavors and exotic medicinal herb and mineral qualities. The minerality adds urgency to the sweet, dark fruit-dominated finish, which clings tenaciously. This could use some cellar time or aeration.



2008 Familia Nin-Ortiz Planetes de Nin Priorat

92

(\$45; 70% garnacha and 30% carinena, raised in foudre Vivid red. High-pitched, exotic aromas of raspberry preserves, dried violet, incense and licorice combine with a serious undertone of smoky minerality and Asian spices. Sweet and precise, with lively red and dark berry flavors and notes of star anise and cinnamon and a silky texture. Blends depth, power and energy deftly and finishes on a seductive spicy note, with excellent, mineral-driven persistence.



2008 Clos I Terrasses Laurel Priorat

92

(\$48; 70% garnacha, 20% cabernet sauvignon and 10% syrah, raised in one-year-old barrels) Deep ruby. Seductively perfumed, with soil-inflected aromas of cherry, dark berries, smoke, spices and dried violet, along with a strong graphite quality. Velvety and tangy on entry, then ripe and sweet in the mid-palate, lending impressive energy to the almost medicinal cherry and singed plum flavors. Lively on the bright, very long back end, which features lingering floral and mineral attributes. Very pretty now but built for short- to mid-term aging, say another four to six years.

CELLER SELECTIONS (if you can find them)



2008 Clos I Terrasses Clos Erasmus Priorat

94

(\$175; 60% garnacha and 40% syrah) Glass-staining ruby. A wild, highly aromatic bouquet displays raspberry, blackberry, violet and spicecake, with a strong mineral element that gains strength with air. Juicy, penetrating red and dark fruit flavors are given depth by a note of bitter chocolate and include strong mineral spine. The spice and floral notes resonate on a very long, sappy, pure finish. This wine benefits enormously from aeration, but there's no way I'd open a bottle for at least another six years.



2007 Celler Mas Doix Costers de Vinyes Velles Priorat

93

(\$125; 50% carinena, 48% garnacha and 2% merlot) Vivid ruby. Extremely fresh, expansive aromas of raspberry, candied rose, Asian spices and minerals. Pure and mineral-driven, with sweet red fruit flavors and a lashing of minerality that adds lift and clarity. The floral and spice notes resonate on a very long, juicy, incisive finish, which also features a touch of white pepper. This was aged in 100% new French oak, but I barely detected it. The importer says most of these vines were planted in 1912.



2008 Ester Nin Nit de Nin Priorat

92

(\$125; 60% garnacha and 40% carinena) Glass-staining ruby. Displays an array of spice-accented red and dark fruits scents, with notes of smoky minerals, licorice and black pepper. Juicy, focused and pure, with sweet raspberry and bitter cherry flavors underscored by tangy acidity. Fine-grained tannins give shape to a long, sweet, energetic finish. Very young but this is already showing complexity. These vines are reportedly from 80 to 100 years old.

RARE PRIORAT WHITES



2008 Cal Raspallet Nun Vinya dels Taus Penedes

92

(\$70; made entirely from xarel·lo) Bright gold. An exotic, highly perfumed nose evokes poached pear, yellow plum and honey, with a dusty mineral overlay. Juicy and broad on entry but firmer in the mid-palate, offering a range of sweet citrus and orchard fruit flavors and a touch of bitter fruit pit. The mineral quality lingers on the lush, penetrating finish. This wine is made by Ester Nin (of Clos Erasmus) from vines that are reputedly 65 to 100 years old.



2009 Conreria d'Scala Dei Les Brugueres Priorat Blanco

92

(\$30; 100% garnacha blanca) Light gold. Bright, spicy aromas of pear, lemon curd, honey and toasty lees. Concentrated, tactile and dense, with spicy lift to its flavors of white fruit and candied flowers. A chewy, mineral-driven wine, showing the richness of old vines, reportedly more than a century old. Finishes bright and long, echoing the lemon and pear notes. This wine's blend of depth and energy is intriguing.

THE SOUTHERN MEDITERRANEAN COAST



2008 Casa Castillo Monastrell Jumilla

89

(\$12; from vines reportedly up to 86 years old) Deep ruby. An exotic, highly perfumed bouquet displays dark berries, cola, lavender and a hint of smokiness (no new oak, though). Chewy blackberry and bitter cherry flavors show good depth and intensity, with sweet red fruit on the back end. A floral note echoes on the juicy, lively finish. Lots going on here for the money.



2009 Bodegas Castano Monastrell Yecla

88

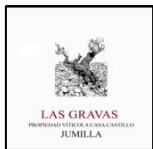
(\$8; all stainless steel) Vivid ruby. Spicy redcurrant and cherry aromas are complicated by notes of dried flowers and licorice. Firm and precise in the mouth, offering lively red berry flavors and a hint of bitter cherry pit. Gains sweetness with air and finishes with very good clarity and spicy persistence. This is a ridiculous value.



2008 Bodegas Mustiguillo Mestis VT El Terrerazo

88 (+?)

(\$16; 50% bobal, with a blend of tempranillo, syrah, cabernet sauvignon and merlot) Inky ruby. Musky aromas of dried cherry, licorice and tobacco, with an exotic Indian spice quality. Intriguingly bitter cherry and herb flavors provide very good palate coverage and are enlivened by a peppery note. On the serious side and in need of some air; leaves botanical herb and bitter cherry notes behind a penetrating, spicy finish.



2007 Casa Castillo Las Gravas Jumilla

90

(\$25; 70% monastrell and 15% each of cabernet sauvignon and syrah, raised in new 500-liter French barrels) Deep ruby. Youthful medicinal aromas of dark cherry, licorice, bitter chocolate and herbs, enhanced by a hint of vanilla. Juicy and fresh but also supple and ripe, with fleshy cherry-vanilla, mocha and spice flavors supported by a firm spine of acidity. Tannins build with air but don't show any hardness. Finishes with gentle grip and a suggestion of slightly roasted fruits.



2008 Casa Castillo Valtosca Jumilla

90

(\$25; 100% syrah) Inky purple. Exotic, heady aromas of black cherry, blackcurrant, apricot, licorice and violet, with a suggestion of smokiness. Sweet and juicy but tight, with firm flavors of dark berry compote, peppery spices and black olive. Very syrah. Finishes with fine-grained tannins that avoid coming off as dry. This could be tossed into a northern Rhone tasting and do well.



2007 Bodegas Mustiguillo Finca Terrerazo VT El Terrerazo

91

(\$45; 85% bobal, 10% tempranillo and 5% cabernet sauvignon, from vines that reportedly sit at 850 meters altitude) Deep ruby. An exotically perfumed bouquet displays cinnamon, allspice-accented dark berries and cherry, with a strong floral overtone. Spicy and incisive on the palate, offering sweet blackberry and cherry compote flavors and a hint of mocha. Smoky coffee and dark fruit notes linger on a long, sappy, very smooth finish. Showing plenty of complexity right now.



2007 Bodegas Mustiguillo Quincha Corral VT El Terrerazo

93

(\$85; 100% bobal) Opaque ruby. Wild aromas of dark berries, cherry cola, tobacco, dried flowers, licorice and sandalwood. Broad and silky in the mouth, marrying superb intensity with a seamless texture and deep black and blue fruit flavors. Alluringly sweet and expansive, this is delicious now but built to age for at least another five years. Finishes very long, with notes of candied violet and cola.

DOWN BY THE RIVER – Tempranillo from Rioja & Ribera del Duero



2006 Bodegas Izadi Rioja Reserva

90

(\$18; 100% tempranillo) Ruby-red. Highly fragrant, displaying scents of blackberry, incense and dark chocolate, with a spicy overtone. Creamy in texture and deep in black and blue fruit flavors, with supple tannins adding shape and gentle grip on the back. Becomes smoky and more floral with air and finishes on a sweet candied violet note. Drinking very well right now; this would be great with braised lamb or a dish containing mushrooms.



2004 Bodegas Izadi El Regalo Rioja Reserva

90 (+?)

(\$30; mostly tempranillo, with graciano and garnacha) Vivid ruby. Oak-spiced aromas of cherry cola, blueberry and minerals, with a smoky overtone. Sweet red and dark berry preserve flavors are complicated by notes of coconut and mocha, with the floral quality repeating. Lots of sexy, sweet fruit here but the coconutty oak is quite powerful as well. Finishes with good spicy thrust and lingering sweetness. Time will tell if the dense fruit can outlast the wood. This was raised in a 50/50 blend of French and American oak. This estate is owned by the same proprietors as Finca Villacreces in Ribera del Duero and by one of the region's top restaurants, Zaldirian, in Vitoria-Gasteiz.



2007 Bodegas Orben Rioja

91

(\$35; 97% tempranillo and 3% graciano) Glass-staining ruby. Lively and complex nose offers candied cherry, blackberry, violet, minerals and spicecake. Open-knit, intensely flavored and nicely detailed, offering juicy red and dark fruit flavors and complicating notes of allspice and anise. Tannin-free and alluring right now, with very good finishing clarity, lingering floral elements and sweetness. This is very easy to drink right now and shows the best side of this difficult vintage.



2007 Bodegas Orben Malpuesta Rioja

90 (+?)

(\$50; 100% tempranillo, from 80-year-old vines, according to the importer) Inky ruby. Deeper and more brooding than the Orben, displaying scents of cherry pit, licorice and espresso, with slow-building floral and smoke notes. Pretty wound up, opening reluctantly to show rich black and blue fruit flavors and a touch of bitter chocolate. Appears to have good energy, but this wine isn't easy to read right now and definitely needs some patience. I prefer the vivacity of the Orben now, but this is clearly built to age. This is another project of the Anton family, Finca Villacreces and Bodegas Izadi.



2008 Finca Villacreces Pruno Ribera del Duero

90

(\$20; includes small amounts of cabernet sauvignon and merlot) Deep ruby. Expansive aromas of fresh red berries, Asian spice and minerals, with a subtle floral quality. Silky and seamless, with sweet raspberry and cherry flavors and an exotic floral pastille note adding complexity. Fine-grained tannins add shape on the finish and fade quickly into the sweet fruit. This is delicious right now.



2007 Creta Ribera del Duero Roble

90

(\$14; from vines ranging from 40 to 60 years old, in the prime La Horra sector) Glass-staining ruby. Spicy dark berry and cherry-vanilla aromas are complemented by anise, tobacco and herbs. Juicy cherry and blackcurrant flavors are pure and nicely focused, with no obvious tannins and a seductively sweet quality. Reminds me a bit of a Pesquera wine. Finishes on a lively bittersweet cherry note, with very good persistence and lingering spice and vanilla notes.



2007 Hacienda Monasterio Ribera del Duero

92

(\$60; 80% tempranillo, 15% cabernet sauvignon and 5% merlot) Vivid ruby-red. Sexy, pinot-like aromas of strawberry, raspberry, potpourri and Asian spices. Then deeper in personality on the palate, offering sweet black raspberry and cherry flavors and a jolt of peppery spice. Packs a punch but shows an elegant side, finishing with very good clarity and spicy persistence.



2007 Quinta Sardonía Vino de la Tierra de Castilla y Leon

92

(\$50; 51% tinto fino and 29% cabernet sauvignon, augmented by merlot, syrah, petit verdot, cabernet franc and malbec) Deep ruby. Redcurrant, tobacco and dried rose aromas; really showing the cabernet right now. Spicy and precise, with sweet red berry and cherry flavors and a deeper note of blackberry that comes up with air. Very floral on the finish, which shows very good clarity and intensity. Note that the price for this wine has rolled back from \$60 for earlier vintages. According to owner Peter Sisseck, the soil here is mostly limestone, and the vineyards (which were only planted in 1999 and 2000) are sited at between 750 and 830 meters. This wine has been improving steadily as the vines mature.

GREEN SPAIN - Galicia



2009 Egia Enea Bizkaiko Txakolina

90

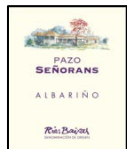
(\$20; 80% hondarrabi zuri zerratia and 20% hondarrabi zuri) Light, bright gold. Emphatic, spice-laced aromas of tangerine, lemon and green apple, with a hint of white flowers. Sappy and palate-staining, with more power than most Txakolis (this is 12.5% alcohol, on the high side for the category), with strong finishing cut and a lingering note of bitter pear skin. These wines are wondrous with food. (Eric Solomon Selections, Charlotte, NC)



2009 Bodegas Rafael Palacios Louro do Bolo Valdeorras

91

(\$20; 92% godello and 8% treixadura) Pale yellow. Alluringly pure, mineral-dominated nose blends citrus fruits, ginger, white pepper and minerals. Wonderfully fresh and vibrant in the mouth, with flavors similar to the aromas, conveying an impression of vivacity with no excess weight. Closes on a nervy lime zest note and with excellent clarity and length.



2009 Pazo de Senorans Albarino Rias Baixas

92

(\$24) Vivid yellow-gold. An intensely perfumed bouquet shows aromas of nectarine, iodine, lees and pungent flowers, with a strong mineral undertone. Very rich and exotic but possesses a serious spine of acidity, which adds lift to broad tropical and pit fruit flavors. The lees and iodine notes repeat on a long, floral-accented finish. This wine's marriage of power and vibrancy, not to mention its complexity, is very impressive.



2009 Pena das Donas Verdes Matas Mencia Ribeira Sacra

91

(\$20) Bright ruby. A compelling, smoky bouquet of red and dark berries, violet, cracked pepper and minerals, with a hint of olive. Smells like a pretty serious wine from the northern Rhone and tastes like one as well, offering sweet raspberry and cherry flavors and notes of candied flowers and spices. Nervy and precise on the finish, which strongly echoes the spice and floral notes. This is impressively pure-an outstanding value.



2009 Bodegas Valdesil Val de Sil Valdeorras

90

(\$17; 100% godello) Light, bright gold. Expressive aromas of soft citrus fruits, white peach and dried flowers, complemented by a suggestion of smoky lees. Creamy in texture and quite dry, with a tactile quality to the gently smoky orchard and pit fruit flavors. Finishes on a firm mineral note with admirable precision. I like this wine's mix of richness and vivacity.

RUEDA WHITES



2008 Ossian Vides y Vinos Blanco Castilla y Leon

92

(\$45; 100% verdejo, raised in French barriques) Bright gold. An exotically scented bouquet features dried pear, mango and apricot, made more complex by notes of botanical herbs, honey and minerals. A wild and singular wine, it offers pliant pit and tropical fruit flavors along with notes of bay, sage and mint. The honeyed quality comes back strong on the broad, spicy, very long finish. According to the importer, these vines were planted on sandy soils that phylloxera never reached and are more than 180 years old.



2009 Sitios de Bodega Con Class Rueda

89

(\$12; 60% verdejo, 25% viura and 15% sauvignon blanc) Greenish yellow. A fragrant bouquet offers pear, lemongrass and mint, with zesty minerals gaining strength with air. Firm, finely etched citrus and herb flavors are refreshingly dry and pack solid punch. The citrus qualities linger on the long, mineral-tinged finish.



2009 Vila Viniteca El Perro Verde Verdejo Rueda

89

(\$15) Pale gold. Nuanced, fruit-driven nose combines ripe citrus fruits, mango, fresh pineapple, ginger, lemon thyme and minerals. Dense and almost opulent, but lively as well, with flavors similar to the bouquet. Offers a suave balance of tropical and citrus fruits, minerals and herbs. Finishes with good cut and a touch of lingering warmth. Shows the vintage, a good thing if you plan to drink it up by the time the 2010 arrives.