

PAZO BARRANTES NEW RHYTHM CHANGE

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PAZO BARRANTES IN RECENT YEARS BRINGS TO MIND THE IMAGE OF THOSE GREAT ATHLETES WHO, AT THEIR PHYSICAL PEAK, CAN INCREASE THE DEMAND ON THEMSELVES AND CHANGE THEIR RHYTHM, USUALLY WITH DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES FOR THEIR RIVALS. IN THIS CASE, WE ARE WITNESSING A NEW TURN IN THE WAY THESE WINES ARE AGED, IN THEIR LAUNCH DATE AND ALSO IN THE PRESENTATION OF THEIR FLAGSHIP WINE.



» Thanks to its history and distinction, Pazo de Barrantes could be the emblematic winery in Valle del Salnés, in competition with legendary names and other more recent ones, who, luckily for the area, are in plentiful numbers. The winery has not aspired to this, or so it seems, as it has followed a fairly discreet career in the wake of another historical winery, namely Marqués de Murrieta in Rioja. Here, it is important to point out that, although it has less weight in all respects (production, history, commercial presence, distinction), the Galician winery is not a subsidiary of

the winery in Rioja. In fact, it could actually be the other way around: Vicente Cebrián, who owns the Pazo Barrantes estate, bought Marqués de Murrieta in 1983; although he advanced the launch of the first Pazo Barrantes bearing his label, by six years, they have been growing vines and making wines here in Galicia for centuries, for their own drinking. The Counts de Creixel have owned the estate since 1511, when building started. The property easily has everything one would expect it to have, according to the popular saying: “*con capilla, palomar y ciprés, pazo es*” (with a

chapel, a barn and cypress trees just like every estate should). They also have a huge granary and some old Eucalyptus trees (possibly the oldest in Galicia), which pave the access road to the property. A twelve-hectare estate planted under vine surrounds the property, and there are a further four adjacent hectares that belong to the Arch Bishop of Santiago; however, they are tied to the winery through a long-term leasing contract. Yet there is one thing that Vicente Cebrián would love to have: a part of the historic estate, planted with Albariño, that a close

relative, his aunt, sold, and which he can see no way of recovering. Barrantes itself also adds some historical value, thanks to the so-called *Pacto de Barrantes* (The Barrantes Agreement) which was signed in 1930 by a group of intellectuals, and is considered to be one of the starting points of the Galician nationalist movement. There is also the Barrantes family history throughout the county, particularly highlighted by the great-grandmother of the current owners, Julia Becerra Malvar, the good countess. She married the Count of Creixell



and was very socially aware, standing for elections to the Congress of Deputies in 1936. She also donated terrain from her property to build the schools in Ribadumia.

THANKS TO ITS HISTORY AND DISTINCTION, PAZO DE BARRANTES COULD BE THE EMBLEMATIC WINERY IN VALLE DEL SALNÉS.

EMBLEMATIC WINERY

Her grandson, Vicente Cebrián entered the wine world in 1983 by buying Marqués de Murrieta in an auction alongside powerful wine

making groups (including Rumasa). He became responsible for launching the Pazo de Barrantes wines and in 1989 and 1990, they made their first bottles, while the winery was being built next to the estate; it is also built in stone, to blend in with the 16th century building presiding the property. Since that '89 vintage, seen as the beginning of Pazo Barrantes modern wines, the winery has adhered to the orthodoxy of the Albariño grape and the Salnés, albeit with a few personal touches. They have always maintained the profile of a wine made to last, with longevity. Either deliberately or thanks

to the strength of the Albariño grape, it is true that their wines have always responded well to spending time in the bottle. Also, they never have got caught up in the commercial trends that have swept through the area, like the exotic perfumes, sweet overtones or excessive production volumes. The successive changes they have introduced have only made the winery adhere further to their philosophy of classic parameters, with

completely changed the historical Rioja winery, both in terms of its wines and its facilities, and also, on a more discrete yet equal level, the site in Galicia.

THE ESSENTIAL FOR ADVANCING

The wine making team has to interpret and embody the projects devised by the fertile creativity of Vicente Cebrián-Sagarriga. He is a real "pain", in the nicest possible way, as he is always imagining alternatives and ways to



some precise vine growing approaches and state-of-the-art production techniques. These are the factors that the new generation, Vicente and Cristina Cebrián-Sagarriga, have gone into depth over in recent years. The wine making is in the hands of María Vargas, the oenologist who runs things from Ygay with frequent visits to Barrantes, and Elena Cores, who holds the fort in the vineyard and winery. They make a very well-tuned team and after twenty-five years' work, they have

advance. The paradox is that what he finds, he blends with the historical essence of the Albariño in Salnés. The first twist came when he entrusted María Vargas with managing the Galicia winery while successfully introducing changes to the historical Marqués de Murrieta. The oak cones, the modifications made to production and delaying the bottling and launch helped to deepen the character of the Pazo Barrantes white wine, and its presentation was also radically altered.



At the same time, in 2004 they started to restructure the vineyard, again along the same lines applied to recovering ancestral values: the trellis was replaced gradually with the traditional bower. An old formula for state-of-the-art criteria: a well-fed plant cover of leaves that pick up the sun's energy and protect the bunches that hang freely and well-ventilated from their roof covering. And a soil study to define twelve differentiated plots.

The basic wine, and therefore the only wine, gained in terms of its ageing capacity, but the winery management wanted more. In 2009, after ten years of tests and starting with just one of the plots, i.e. Pago Cacheiro, they made La Comtesse; also, an Albariño varietal and a tribute to the owners' mother, defined as a "*vino exclusivo*".

Like before, they used wood, but with numerous overtones like working with the lees and bottling late, to produce a white wine designed to look straight into the eyes of the best in the area, and in the world.



A NEW TURN

"At Pazo de Barrantes we understand that Albariño is a symbol of top quality among white grape varieties, both nationally and internationally: its aromatic complexity, its particular structure and, naturally, its capacity to age either in wood, concrete or stainless steel, or even in the bottle, means the potential of the Albariño grape is never-ending. In 1989, we started producing Albariño wines in Pazo de Barrantes, and we have always given priority to seeking its quality by preserving the grape's authentic character". The words of Vicente Cebrián-Sagarriga to open the

gateway to a new turn in the winery's development, this time, with Pazo Barrantes as the lead. Those responsible for this radical change that will not see the light of day until 2021, are perfectly happy to call it simply a "new project; it applies what they have learned from the grape and the estate over the last three decades. "We have fought tirelessly", María Vargas points out, "to preserve the great potential of the Albariño grape, as it is very versatile and needs tranquillity to reach its maximum expression. We have added the ingredients that we consider necessary to make the wine we have in mind".

TIME FACTOR

And one of these ingredients is the time factor. This is confirmed by Vicente Cebrián-Sagarriga: "The foundations are laid in the vineyard, an in-depth control that guarantees healthy fruit, and detailed selection is vital for producing wines with these characteristics. To this basis we have added the time that the wine has needed". And the oenologist adds that,

"this wine needs tranquillity, patience and observation, since the grape has plenty of personality and does not like being subject to advanced timings or planning, which cause imbalance and imperfect expression. Also, we have added a new ingredient, i.e. the barrel; a short time in acacia barrels gives it subtlety and moderates its impulsive nature".

Finally, with a nod to the longevity of the great Albariño wines, its ageing in the bottle has been extended "to let all its talents harmonise and reach their full potential. If there is anything that we have learned over

SINCE THAT '89 VINTAGE, SEEN AS THE BEGINNING OF PAZO BARRANTES MODERN WINES, THE WINERY HAS ADHERED TO THE ORTHODOXY OF THE ALBARIÑO GRAPE AND THE SALNÉS.

these years", María Vargas adds, "it's that this wine evolves incredibly over time, producing a unique personality combining its delicacy and elegance with vigour and complexity". And Vicente Cebrián-Sagarriga sums up by saying that "this new Pazo Barrantes '19 will have more authorised ageing, later bottling and gentler in-bottle maturing. We want to highlight the potential of the Albariño grape, its definition, its honesty and elegance, showcased in this wine that is the fruit of everything that the variety has shown us over the years". ■ AP



BODEGAS DIOS BACO RECOVERED HISTORY

PALOMINO & VERGARA WAS ONE OF THE LEADING WINERIES IN JEREZ AT THE START OF THE 20TH CENTURY. THE ORIGIN OF THE PALOMINO GRAPE IS LINKED TO ITS HISTORY. THE WINERY CURRENTLY BELONGS TO THE BUSINESSMAN, JOSÉ PÁEZ MORILLA.

»» My childhood memories are of streets and streets marked by high, whitewashed walls. Buildings with slanted roofs, Arabic tiles and windows at the top, which were relatively small considering the height of the walls. Those completely round, or sometimes oval windows, had railings but never any glass, and that is why walking along those streets was like joining a wine tasting during the olfactory stage (I was not allowed to move on to the tasting stage: I was still a little girl).



Gregorio Ábalos, 2015.

Those unique buildings, where I would dare to say that the winery architecture in Jerez was even as rich as the wines housed inside, made up a large part of the urban framework in Jerez. However, gradually most of these 'cathedrals' have disappeared and have been turned into housing blocks, completely void of any kind of charm. Almost all of them, at least the mainstream ones, had façades crowned with round vases *floreros* and stone jugs, *jarrones*; typical ornaments in cathedral buildings in 19th century Jerez.



Out of all the wineries I walked past in my childhood and teenage years, there was one that really caught my eye. A monumental, majestic winery with a stone

façade, standing on a central street and very close to the railway station. It was the Palomino & Vergara winery. In the 60s and 70s, it was the firm that made and exported very popular Jerez wines and brandies. One of the most important.

It was, and is (thankfully it has survived), crowned by a large statue of the god Bacchus sitting on a throne, with his mantle and glass of wine in hand, and obviously he is smiling, although I could not see so high up. That same winery had another

distinctive characteristic; three huge and beautiful windows with railings nearly reaching down to the street. This was not common in the typical cathedral-type wineries, where the windows were higher up and naturally not as impressive as the ones Palomino & Vergara had.

JEREZ AND THE GOD BACCHUS

With time, when I started to work in wine, they told me intriguing stories about that smiling god Bacchus. However, it is best to start at the beginning. The origins of the Palomino & Vergara winery date back to 1765, but it did not occupy its current site until 1848. That year, the important winery complex was built, of which only three buildings survive today.



These buildings covered many square metres and housed twelve ageing bays, on various blocks, with in-set gardens and streets between them, as was usual. It was a very powerful firm, the third in turnover and sales in Jerez, and they employed about 700 people. They had vineyards and branches in various capitals around the world, and the surnames of the founders joined by such an English symbol as the ampersand (&), were well known in the sherry markets. Palomino & Vergara are actually very Spanish surnames, as there were also important Spanish businessmen who founded, created and supported Jerez at the end of the 18th century. It was not only the British. However, let's get back to Bacchus, the namesake of the current winery. Dios Baco was acquired in 1992 by the Jerez businessman, José Páez Morilla. Here we cannot overlook two very intriguing anecdotes. Around the 1920s, in the lush, exuberant gardens in Bodegas Domecq, there was a statue dedicated to the god, Bacchus. The wife of Pedro Domecq Loustau, who was then the chairman of this important firm, was a very devout, practising Catholic, and she really did not like the idea of the statue of the Pagan god standing in the winery gardens. She ordered that it be removed and it was replaced with a statue of the Sacred Heart.

Some say that, that same statue, is the one that presiding over the entrance to the Dios Baco winery, but I was not able to verify this. However, the press at the time did document another anecdote associated with the famous Bacchus statue at the Palomino & Vergara winery. In the 1930s, Cardinal Segura, the Archbishop of Seville, made a pastoral visit to Jerez. As he left the railway station and went past the façade crowned with the god Bacchus, with his glass in hand and mantle, the cardinal mistook it for a virgin, custody in hand (to be honest, it is a high-standing statue and it is not easy to see the details) and strongly expressed his disapproval.

PALOMINO, FAMILY AND GRAPE

The Palomino & Vergara firm was built up at the beginning of the 20th century, by two partners, Juan Palomino and Juan Vergara. The first was a descendant of Fernán Yáñez Palomino, one of the knights from Castile who lent his troops and money to help King Alfonso X the Wise, to take Jerez square from the Arabs in the 13th century. He was recompensed, like all the knights that fought in the Christian wars, and granted large expansions of land.

Apparently, as there is not much documented evidence, vineyards were

cultivated on most of his lands, which had a very good reputation for producing quality fruit. And the grapes from Mr. Palomino's vineyards started to have signs of identity and to be called by this name. Centuries later, this grape became the queen variety in the Jerez Framework and many other areas. In turn, the Vergara family, like the Palomino family, have a long-standing family tradition in the area. Since the end of the 18th century, they are



documented as both producers and exporters of wines and brandies. The company, Palomino & Vergara, was successful and their Tio Mateo Fino sherry was a reference in Jerez, alongside Tio Pepe and La Ina, until bad times came. At the end of the 60s, the firm was sold to Ruiz Mateos, in the way that Ruiz Mateos used to buy things. More or less twenty years later, in 1983, it was expropriated by the State. Palomino & Vergara, along with Terry, another famous firm in the Jerez framework, were adjudicated and sold, given away really ... to John Harvey & Sons Ltd. Today, many years after all these Rumasa ventures, this multinational firm belongs to the famous Philippine magnet, Andrew Tan, whom we have already talked about in PlanetAVino (The Last



Stand from the Philippines. PlanetAVino, edition 77).

WINE AND VINEGAR BOTH

The ventures that the famous Jerez firms experienced during those years are partly well-kept secrets. Returning to Palomino & Vergara, in 1992, a leading Jerez businessman, son of a great vinegar, white wine and still red wine visionary in the area (Tierra Blanca, Viña Lucía...), José Páez Morilla, acquired the winery; the three buildings and the *criaderas* and *soleras* contained in the *botas* found there.

Some labels like the famous Tio Mateo Fino, had already been bought previously by another local producer, José Estévez, but the bulk of the firm was acquired together with the three *cascos* that were still used for making wine. According to direct family members of the old owners, the firm was sold off in parts, labels on one hand, bays on the other ... For example, the twelve “*catedrales*” at Palomino & Vergara, had disappeared. They were turned into blocks of flats of dubious design and standing. Today part of the in-set gardens is a square in the town, but at least they have been saved from being dug up. The office building that was in the centre, a really palatial affair,



José Páez and his daughter Alejandra.

is still standing but it is locked up ... This was the panorama that José Páez Morilla found when he acquired the winery in 1992. He christened his project, Bodegas dios Baco, and since then, and with help from his daughters and sons-in-law, they have built up a part of the new wine scene in Jerez. Small wineries, small families (for the moment, because as Mao Tse Tung would say, every march starts with one first step).

For me, it is a pleasure to be able to remember the figure of Antonio Páez

Lobato, the father of Pepe Páez. Virtually a self-made man, very intelligent and a true visionary. In the middle of the last century, and aware of the quality of the Jerez vinegars which at that time were a kind of “winery embarrassment”, a failure that should be concealed, it occurred to him to buy the *botas* that had turned to vinegar naturally, real gems, and to sell them packaged in small bottles. It was a complete success and the characteristic 375 cc bottle of *Vinagre de Jerez Reserva 25 Muy Viejo*, stood on the tables in all the world’s top restaurants. Don Antonio Páez opened up a new, prosperous market. He was the king of Jerez vinegar.

The current portfolio of Bodegas Dios Baco, S.L. is extensive. A range called Dios Baco (Manzanilla, Fino, Olorosos, Amontillado, Cream, Pedro Ximénez and Moscatel). Another superior range, called Baco de Elite, under the Elite label (Oloroso and Amontillado), and the Premium range, Baco Imperial, made up of an Oloroso VORS and an Amontillado, Palo Cortado and Pedro Ximénez VOS. They also sell three Jerez brandies (Luis Felipe Solera Gran Reserva, Dios Baco Solera Gran Reserva and Solera Imperial) and, naturally, their own label vinegar. ■ Paz Ivson

