

Castell d'Encus

Extreme Individuality in Northern Spain

Tasted April 2013 with Raül Bobet, proprietor – New York

There is notable diversity in the world of wine, but also an impression of increasing sameness. A few “international” vine varieties – I hardly need to say the names – are planted in all hemispheres and innumerable regions. Without taking the point too far, styles are converging, owing to the use of not simply the same grape types, but also identical practices, equipment and consultants across the world of wine. I could add the influence of climate change, which has blurred the distinction between many classic regions once seen as “cool” and those which, in the past, were considered “hot.” It can be challenging to distinguish one Chardonnay or Cabernet from another regardless of origin. I am exaggerating, of course, but I think many observers would agree there is a great deal of truth in this observation.

The wines of Castell d'Encus are the diametrical opposite: their taste profiles suggest one classic region or another, but they are impossible to pin down. Owner Raül Bobet has opted to grow familiar international grapes, with distinctly individual results. These are wines with unusual names which intrigue and provoke in terms of both taste and intellect.

Raül, bringing lengthy experience in the Spanish wine trade, found a location in 2001 for a new winery and vineyards two hours north of Lleida in Costers del Segre, at elevations of 2,800 to nearly 3,300 feet. Adding to the extraordinary originality of the property, there are fermenters carved out of rock hillsides dating from the 12th century (a technique which can be traced to the earliest origins of wine in the Middle East). Working these stone fermenters is extremely laborious, as you can sense from the photo montage on the next page. A modern cellar holds steel and wood vats as well as barriques. The total production is limited to 6,000 cases.

Tasting Notes of Roger C. Bohmrich MW



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Ekam 2012 (85% Riesling/15% Albariño) *(*)**

Pale yellow straw. The aroma is notably youthful and undeveloped, ultraclean, with a suggestion of citrus, white fruits and a delicate flowery accent. There is evident concentration and a penetrating intensity. In the mouth, this individual white delivers marked intensity and a bracing spinal column of acidity. There is underlying richness though youthfully reserved. An assertive and distinctive Riesling-dominated wine which demands keeping to open and show.

Taleia 2011 (85% Sauvignon Blanc/15% Semillon) **(+)**

Very pale yellow gold. To the nose, this intriguing wine possesses concentration, purity and a perfectly clean quality. There are nuanced yellow fruit notes, but not an overt Sauvignon expression. The impressive palate is very pure, concentrated and precise. Gains in expression and volume. Very long, aromatic, surprisingly powerful finish indicating this wine's aging potential. There is a transparent quality and wonderful lift. Hard to place yet bears a resemblance to Pessac-Léognan. 20% fermented in rock, 40% in steel and 40% in barrique.

Acusp 2011 (100% Pinot Noir) *(*)**

Moderately dense very dark red with a purple rim. Aromatically, the wine is recognizably Pinot Noir with a generous, somewhat warm scent of sweet, enticing dark red berries and fruits. The lovely palate is ripe and exhibits varied fruit highlights along with flesh and weight. There is just a touch of defining tannin and firm acidity which lingers. There was uncharacteristic heat during 2011 in this area, and this wine combines elements of a Russian River Pinot and a Côte d'Or red. The malo was in barrel.

Thalarn 2011 (100% Syrah) **(+)**

Healthy blackish red with purple edge. Highly concentrated and penetrating nose with a mélange of pure dark berries and black fruits. This evocative Syrah aroma recalls Victoria, Australia and the Northern Rhône. The concentrated, youthful taste is more restrained than the aromatics and quite held together. The structure of acidity and tannin is very well-integrated. Young, undeveloped finish. Thalarn represents many heterogeneous lots which undergo carbonic, cold soak and whole bunch fermentation in stone, steel and wood.

Quest 2010 (Cabernet Sauvignon & Franc with Petit Verdot) **(+)**

Moderately dense red with black cast and purple rim. The aroma is fresh, pure and offers a mix of dark red and black fruits with a subdued dusty aspect and very faint green accent, adding complexity. The taste is immediately clean, revealing a striking layered feel and aromatic expression. Very lasting and expressive, delivering a complex marriage of dark fruits, a dusty highlight and a green note. There is fine, elevated acidity and well-matured tannin. This is unmistakably a Bordeaux blend, but identifying its origin is impossible. Undergoes a spontaneous fermentation in stone with a minor portion (5%) in barrel. Malo in barrel.