

MARQUES DE MURRIETA

Eight decades of Rioja history

October 22, 1991 – New York

Background from the perspective of 2012 – During my years as an importer, I worked with many celebrated bodegas of Rioja. The very first was Paternina, followed by Cune and, briefly, Muga and Murrieta, and, finally, the very modern Baron de Ley/El Coto group. I traveled to the region many times and have a deep fondness for Rioja wines. Today, many styles compete, making it difficult to define the “typical” profile of a Rioja wine. Without question, Murrieta falls into the ultra-traditional camp, yet their philosophy is also highly individual. The wines in this remarkable tasting speak of Murrieta’s singular personality. The timing of this historic event also happened to coincide with my decision to enter the Master of Wine program as it was first being introduced to the USA. Before now, I have never published my notes from this tasting.

Background on the wines – Murrieta’s heart and soul is the Ygay estate, the largest unified vineyard property in the Rioja Alta and indeed in all of Rioja. In 2012, a major renovation of the winery buildings was completed, without touching the original 1852 barrel cellar. The name “Castillo Ygay” has been in use since 1912. Historically, 80% of their production has been red wine based on a mix of Tempranillo (on average, 74%), Mazuelo (12%), Garnacha (9%) and Graciano (5%). Whites have relied on Viura (95%) and Malvasia (5%). The Ygay wines may appear under three labels: Etiqueta Blanca/Carta Blanca, Reserva and Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva. The character of Murrieta wines is derived from the terroir of Ygay, traditional basket pressing, and punching down the cap. The wines also see extended aging before release. In the case of Castillo Ygay, this may amount to decades in old, tartrate-lined barrels!

Reserva 1981 ****

Very dark garnet. The aroma is particularly fresh and youthful, revealing very ripe dark fruits with a subtle background of vanilla. The palate is vibrant and firmly held together, with a core of dark red fruit. The wine possesses a strong acid frame. Full of character. Could be kept for many years. 46 months in fairly new wood, 38 months in the old tartrate-encrusted barrels. 13% alc.

Reserva 1970 ****

Pale garnet color. Very fine and delicate aromatics marrying small red fruits and complementary oak. The palate is notably fresh and elegant. Medium weight. The flavors are delicate and understated, suggesting further development potential. Fine and subtle. 36 months in fairly new wood, 89 months in old barrels. 13% alc.

Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva 1968 **(+)**

Dark garnet showing only slight evolution. The nose is superb and deep, revealing concentrated red fruits and a creamy, vanilla background. The taste is astonishingly vital and strong, with a remarkable richness of fruit and vanillin. There is very lively acidity and the finish is extremely long and expansive. There is still a bracing of tannin at the end. This can certainly age much longer in bottle! 4 years in fairly new wood, 10 years in old barrels. Bottled January 1983. 12.9% alc.



Castillo Ygay Gran Reserva 1959 **(*)**

Pale garnet color which appears so young, with only the slightest tawny at the rim. The nose is profound yet somehow seems to be reserved with a youthful freshness. Twenty-five years in wood, yet the oak is not at all prominent. In the mouth, the 1959 is alive and fresh with the flavors still hidden. Very well knit with a long, well-defined finish. Clearly, a wine that will develop further and shows no weakening whatsoever! 4 years in fairly new wood, 21 years in old wood. Bottled May 1986. 13% alc.

Carta Blanca 1958 ****

The color is dark garnet with a tawny rim. The bouquet is very broad, rich and ample, revealing an inviting mélange of dried red fruits and wood. The palate follows perfectly and is especially powerful and mouth-filling. The aftertaste offers a rich, slightly sweet undertone. This is a generous wine from a great Rioja vintage. 41 months in fairly new wood. Bottled December 1962, recorked in 1988. 13% alc.

Chateau Ygay 1952 *****

Very dark garnet, striking for its age. The bouquet is splendidly rich, exhibiting a mix of roasted nuts and sweet dried fruits. The palate is full and substantial. Very richly flavored and dominated by red and dried fruits with a restrained woodiness (despite 32 years in barrel!). Bright, defining acidity. Very well-knit, harmonious wine with an impressively long aromatic finish. 4 years in fairly new wood, 28 years in old barrels. Bottled January 1986, original cork. 13.1% alc.

Carta Blanca 1948 ****

Dark garnet color with a tawny rim. The rich nose reveals very ripe red fruit, particularly red cherry and currant together with vanillin. The palate is powerful, fleshy and firmly structured. The aftertaste offers red fruits and wood, and some tannin is still present! An excellent, full-bodied wine which can still develop even though it is 43 years old. 46 months in fairly new wood. Bottled March 1953, recorked in 1988. 13.1% alc.

Carta Blanca 1934 **+**

A beautiful dark garnet color which is alive and vibrant. Amazingly youthful nose offering a red berry perfume. Delicate and very fine. The palate has ideal proportions and equilibrium: not a big wine, but in perfect harmony. Delicate fruit accents and wood linger. 1934 is considered a great year. 62 months in fairly new wood. Bottled September 1940, recorked in 1988. 13.1% alc.

Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial 1934 *+**

Dark ruby with tawny at edge. Curiously neutral nose – difficult to locate bouquet. The palate has lightened considerably and lacks richness at this point. Retains freshness due to fine acidity. This is unlikely to repay further cellaring. 4 years in fairly new wood, 34 years in old barrels. Bottled July 1974, original cork. 13.1% alc.

Carta Blanca 1928 ***

Pale dark ruby with tawny at rim – once more, a youthful appearance for its age. The nose is dominated by vanillin and a volatile sharpness. The attack is soft and silky, and then the wine thins at the center. Woody flavors remain for some time in the finish. A well-evolved wine. 60 months in fairly new wood. Bottled May 1934, recorked in 1957 and 1988. 12.1% alc.

Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial 1925 ***!**

Dark ruby to the eye – almost no evolution! Multidimensional bouquet displaying old oak, cedar, nuts and very subtle red fruit. A very fine, almost ethereal fragrance. Silky and fresh quality on attack. Lightening somewhat, yet superb, complex flavors last in the aftertaste. This wine has exceptional elegance, delicacy and balance. Stunning Ygay at its best. 5 years in fairly new wood, 33 years in old barrels. Bottled April 1964, original cork. 13% alc.

Castillo Ygay Reserva Especial 1917 ***

Dark garnet with a slight cloudiness. Evolving, oxidizing nose. Has begun to fall apart, leaving a hollowness. An interesting piece of history but is in a declining phase. 4 years in fairly new wood, 41 years in old barrels. Bottled July 1963, original cork. 13.1% alc.

Carta Blanca 1915 ***

Paling garnet with mahogany highlights. A flatter, low-toned bouquet exhibiting considerable maturity: caramel and roasted nuts. The palate has a similar profile. A bit of structure holds it together. Not as impressive today as it may have been earlier in its life. 60 months in fairly new wood. Bottled July 1921, recorked in 1957 and 1988. 12.1% alc.

Carta Blanca 1901 ***!**

Pale garnet with mahogany. The magnificent bouquet displays a deep warm richness along with old wood, black tea and roasted nuts. In the mouth, the 1901 is similarly complex in its aromatics. There is a remarkable liveliness with fresh, elegant acidity for a 90-year old wine. The finish is expansive and very, very long. This is astonishing, all the more because 1901 was considered just a “good” vintage. 56 months in fairly new wood. Bottled January 1907, recorked in 1928, 1957 and 1988. 12.2% alc.

