

deborahparkerwong



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Carpe vinum vitrum

written by **deborahparkerwong**



Seize every opportunity to meet and taste with the makers

No matter one's knowledge of wine, there is simply no substitute for tasting. For those of us who keep an eye on the world's ever-evolving wine regions, that means seizing an opportunity to taste as well as to meet the makers.

Raising a glass of the current 2013 vintage release of Dom Perignon after more than a few years of neglect on my part left me almost speechless. In March, I met briefly with self-described "curious guy" Daniel Carvajal Pérez, a Columbian-born bioprocess engineer who joined the Champagne house as Responsable Patrimoine Œnologie in 2019. In his role, he has focused on developing processes that eliminate distracting molecules from the base wines, designing innovative gastronomic experiences, and codifying the winery's historical best practices.

I was surprised to learn that the base wines for the cuvee completed malolactic conversion at the peak of fermentation. "As early as 2000, we moved to increase the intensity of the wines," said Carvajal Perez who works with Chef du Cave Vincent Chaperon on the assemblage. 2013 was a warmer vintage, reflecting a trend



*Daniel Carvajal Pérez, Responsable Patrimoine
Œnologie chez Dom Pérignon. Credit Leif Carlsson*

as been working in favor of the Champenoise. The 51%/49% blend of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay shows plenty of ripe fruit but it's sleek and saline with a density and texture that I can only attribute to increased amounts of dry extract and seven years of autolysis.

Looking south to Priorat, I met with Clos Mogador's René Barbier IV for breakfast at San Francisco hotel Citizen M before he headed to Napa. As of 2017, the producer's namesake wine, Clos Mogador, is one of only four Vinya Classificada (Premier Cru) wines recognized by the Priorat Denominació d'Origen Qualificada (DOQ) and is the first wine in Spain to also be designated Vi de Finca (estate

wine). The winery's Manyetes is a Vi de la Vila (village wine) for Gratallops and its white wine, Nelin – a blend of Grenache blanc and Macabeu – is Priorat DOQ. The winery also produces Com Tu, a monovarietal Garnacha from the Montsant D.O., and Barbier alluded to Clos Mogador's first-ever rosé, which is as yet unnamed but scheduled for release this year.

Barbier spoke passionately about the gains Clos Mogador has made in the vineyards, which are certified organic and have been farmed regeneratively over the last five years. "When everything is in balance, the wines are far more stable," he said, a fact that allows for the use of native yeast and low amounts of sulfur at bottling. That said, water continues to be a concern for Barbier, who noted ongoing tensions over rights to the river water that goes to the city of Barcelona. "The older vines are at risk and we're focusing on higher elevations for new plantings,"

Weeks after our meeting, I received the 2020 Clos Mogador Gratallops, a blend of 49% Garnacha, 29% Cariñena, 16% Syrah and 10% Cabernet Sauvignon, and tasted it

with my students. We marveled at its approachability and balance in spite of the 15% ABV and the potential it conveys for lengthy aging. Protected from the cierzo winds by the Montsant mountains that cradle it, Priorat's Mediterranean climate and the carboniferous llicorella (a soil with different stages of evolution composed of shale, slate and eventually schist) can be felt in the wine.



Clos Mogador's René Barbier IV. Credit: Clos Mogador