

WHITEWATER VALEY WINE SOCIETY
March 2023 Tasting
The Wines of Rioja
Presented by Pierre Mansour, Head of Buying, The Wine Society

Our Society receives tremendous support from The Wine Society and it was with much pleasure that we welcomed their head of buying, Pierre Mansour to present to us this month. One of Pierre's specific roles is as buyer for Spain, so it was very appropriate that he chose to present wines from the Rioja region. The Wine Society has an excellent range of Rioja wines in its portfolio. We started with some whites and then moved on to taste a range of the reds for which the region is so well known. These included two rare wines, made available to us from the Society's private cellars, including a 2004 Gran Reserva.

With a full house, expectations were high as we tasted our first wine - a **Cava Conde de Haro Brut Reserva 2019** [12%, £13.95] and until recently the only 'methode champenoise' wine permitted to be produced in the region. This Viura had a bright pale lemon colour and fine beads of bubbles, with a fresh and toasty richness. Bone dry and without oak it had a good balance of fruit, acidity and fizz with a long finish. An excellent alternative to its French equivalent!

Next came **The Society's White Rioja 2020** [12.5%, £9.25], pale lemon in colour and a blend of Viura/Malvasia of 90/10%. Oak was present but not too noticeable. Slightly off-dry this wine had a nose of autumn fruit and was full of spicy, nutty flavours; good value!

Our third wine was a special and rare treat - a **Lopez de Heredia Vina Gravonia Blanco 2008** [12.5%, for tasting only] that had a golden hue. Despite its age the nose was fresh and aromatic and its many flavours of salt, burnt sugar and toasty creamy oak went on and on. An excellent accompaniment to Iberian ham!

Pierre then introduced us to his selection of reds, each chosen for a specific reason. Our first - a **Casa La Rad Solarce Rioja 2020** [14%, £8.75] was a 'modern' style Rioja that had a bright, cherry red colour and was a blend of mostly Tempranillo/Graciano. This wine had a rich nose with a hint of orange zest and was fruit dominant on the palate with raspberry and cherry flavours; a big and bold wine with a hint of spice on the finish. Excellent value!

Our next wine was described by Pierre as 'wild', a **Vinos en Voz Baja Costumbres Rioja Orientale 2020** [14.5%, £16.00], because it is designed to be a 'natural' expressive wine, left unfiltered. Vinified from mostly old bush Garnacha grapes that ripen well in the warmer south of the region, this wine had bolder tannins, a hint of oak and a herby Mediterranean character - interesting!

This was followed by **The Society's Exhibition Rioja Reserva 2018** [14.5%, £17.00] that was more Pinot Noir in colour style/translucency. This Tempranillo made in traditional style, had a bright cherry red colour and spice and oak on the nose from two year's ageing in American oak barrels. It was full bodied with a leathery, smoky character and was smooth and elegant on the palate.

Our penultimate wine was a **Glorioso Gran Reserva Rioja 2016** [14%, £19.00] 100% Tempranillo from Bodegas Palacio that had a deep cherry red colour and well integrated oak from being aged for 24 months in American and French oak barrels. This was a beautifully crafted wine - intense with hints of cedar and gentle smoke on the nose and fresh fruit flavours on the palate. Quite delightful!

And to end this wonderful feast of Spanish wines came a **Contino Gran Reserva 2004 Magnum** [13.5 %, for tasting only] crafted from a blend of 75/15/10% Tempranillo/Graciano/Garnacha that had an intense cherry red colour. The nose was elegant, complex and intense and on the palate there were flavours of black tea, mushrooms and bark aromas, ripe fruit undertones and toasted spices. It was indeed a treat to taste a full bodied, rounded and polished wine that was 19 years old and absolutely lovely!

Members present showed their gratitude in a full and long applause to Pierre to express their thanks for a most interesting tasting that helped them appreciate more fully the different aspects of wine production in Rioja from traditional to modern. Being able to savour some of the different elements was indeed a pleasure and delight. Hurry back soon, Pierre!