



## Benjamin Romeo, Rioja, Spain, En Primeur 2008 & 2009 Vintage

Spain, June 2010. It was early afternoon and our Trade Sales Manager Rachel Donnelly and I were charging 150 miles across Spain from the Ribera del Duero to Rioja, where Rachel would visit Benjamin Romeo for the first time. Remembering my own first impression, I was excited at introducing a colleague to this fascinating estate and to the inspirational man behind it – Benjamin Romeo himself. I also knew a secret. Benjamin had decided to host the first ever vertical tastings of one of his wines, La Viña de Andres, in our honour.

Benjamin is a complex character, Latin in temperament yet obsessive about detail and order. He had a vision from which nothing and no-one would or will deflect him. Everything he has achieved has been mapped out systematically, the better to affect his wines. Totally uncompromising, he is absolutely determined to make his own wine, his way, though his chosen route to success was initially anything but easy. Firstly the vineyards were scattered over dozens of sites, most of which are so small that, in isolation, they are unviable. The source of grapes was one challenge but then, with a cellar placed way down in Benjamin's list of priorities, his first wines had to be produced in his father's garage and then over-wintered in the cool environment of natural caves at the top of the steep hill which characterises San Vicente de la Sonsierra.

In 2008, he opened a cellar which goes so far beyond state of the art – a fabulous Bond-esque structure which melds seamlessly into the landscape on which it is built. Constructed on a number of levels, it emulates the natural contours of the rockface, allowing the wines to be moved by gravity thus eliminating damaging pumps. The building materials, choice of hardwood, and equipment are of the best quality. Roof terraces are planted with the same herbs which grow wild amongst the vines, their heady aromas tantalising the senses, reminiscent of the vineyards.

Stylish, modern and hugely efficient, it was designed by a young architect closely supervised by Benjamin. At the heart of this feat of modernity there is an emotive reminder of Benjamin's roots, with a black and white print of his grandmother, a tiny woman with a panier of similar stature, full of grapes, strapped to her back. Benjamin has a profoundly rooted sense of tradition and history which is his anchor.

In the time available, we trundled around as many vineyard sites as possible, marvelling at the complexity of Benjamin's operation – different aspects, meso- and microclimates and exposures all contributing their individual character to the flagship wine Contador, the second label La Cueva del Contador, Que Bonita Cacareaba, the white, and the Predicadors.

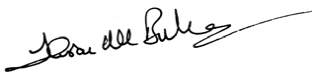
The exception in Benjamin's Rioja portfolio is La Viña de Andres, a 3.5 ha contiguous riverside plot planted by Benjamin's father, after whom it is named. The vines here are planted in clay over a limestone subsoil, free-draining as a result of alluvial deposits of rounded pebbles. The challenge here is tempering the natural productivity of the vines and Benjamin prunes heavily. His final boost to the intensity of the finished wine is an early harvest, reducing the production to one bunch per branch – the "prunings" producing a *rosado* which is sold off in bulk.

Benjamin's wines are so individual yet they are faithful to their origins, with a real sense of place. As we analyse them, we often forget to mention that, with the exception of outsider Macizo, these are in fact supreme examples of Rioja which, in true Benjamin fashion, do not conform to the more usual labelling conventions.

The vertical tasting of La Viña de Andres was magnificent, a fascinating insight into how these great wines might mature – clearly slowly. Benjamin himself had never had such a tasting so it was a huge honour for us to be present at such an obviously emotional event.

Given the youthful character of even the oldest wine, I expect we are still being very conservative with our drinking dates.

We recommend all of these wines most highly and are delighted to have an additional white in the portfolio.



**Alison Buchanan**  
**Associate Director, Buying**  
**June 2009**



*Benjamin Romeo*



*Vineyards*



*Church of Santa Maria la Mayor*

## **2009 Vintage Notes – white wines**

2009 started with cold weather, ideal for killing off the less welcome wildlife and diseases and snow and rain helped to replenish the water table – which was fortuitous given the hot summer which followed. Spring was both dry and hot and, over all, over 70% of the season enjoyed cloudless skies. Summer was about 2°C warmer than usual. The older vines fared well as their roots were able to dig deeply for nutrients, avoiding too much stress. By harvest time it was clear that ripening was very even though, as ever, Benjamin picked in stages, waiting until the grapes has attained optimal ripeness, and harvesting between the 29<sup>th</sup> September and 1<sup>st</sup> October. Each parcel was cold macerated for 48 hours before fermentation in new French oak.

## **2008 Vintage Notes**

In contrast to the dry conditions of the preceding year, 2008, was a wet season. Winter had been dry but Spring thought otherwise, bringing in very wet conditions which served to replenish the water table. June was also wet, inhibiting flowering to a degree and therefore limiting ultimate yields. July and August were normal but the rains earlier in the year demanded considerable attention in the vineyard to combat mildew and oidium – both of which, though controlled, further limited yields. January through to April was extremely warm, before the weather returned to normal conditions through until harvest, after which it turned very cold. 75% of the year saw cloudless, sunny days which, combined with the reduced production, made for perfect ripeness and balance. There was nonetheless a certain irregularity in the ripening of 2008 which Benjamin overcame by making numerous passages through the vineyards, picking as and when individual vines reached maturity so that the outcome was healthy, ripe fruit with impeccably-balanced tannins and acidity.

## **2009 Tasting Notes – white wines**

### **Macizo Blanco Cataluña**

**Corney & Barrow Score 17 to 18**

**50% Xarello, 24% Garnacha Blanca (Vieja), 17% Garnacha Blanca (Joven), 9% Malvasía**

Benjamin is passionate about his native Rioja but that does not prevent him casting an eye elsewhere if the circumstances are right. The conditions he sets are clear for such a venture and they are strict. He has no desire to become a flying winemaker, of any sort. It has to be a traditional area which, in his mind is not fulfilling its potential in some way. The vineyards and therefore fruit have to be top-notch and he has to have 100% control –

just as in Rioja. Finally and as important, there must be no conflict with the Rioja harvest time-wise. Fortunately Cataluña came up trumps and Macizo is the result (pronounced matheeso), this is produced from old vine fruit, pruned down to produce 1.5kg per vine and it is matured for 8 months in 50% new, 50% one-year-old barrels. A pale yellow-gold in colour, it presents ripe stone and orchard fruit layered with cream. There are hints of sandalwood and a refined mineral character provides an attractive focus.

**Recommended drinking from 2010 to 2013 plus**

**£160/case of 12, in bond UK**

### **Predicador, Rioja Blanco - NEW**

**Corney & Barrow Score 18**

**78% Viura, 11% Malvasia, 11% Garnacha Blanca**

This is the first vintage of Predicador Blanco to be offered to the UK and we are delighted to have an allocation. It comes from 10 sites, mostly on clay-limestone soils. Just 8,000 bottles are produced from vines cropped at 2kg per vine. The wine is matured in new French oak for 7 months. A very pretty pale gold in colour, this was a little shy on the nose initially when we tasted. Gradually it reveals floral notes and fresh orchard fruit, enriched by vanilla cream and lifted by citrus notes – lime zest and lemongrass. The palate echoes the aromatics suggested by the nose, adding herbal nuances and hints of the exotic – stone fruit and physalis. This is very pretty indeed and a fine foil for the red.

**Recommended drinking from 2010 to 2014 plus**

**£180/case of 12, in bond UK**

### **Que Bonita Cacareaba, Rioja Blanco**

**Corney & Barrow Score 18 to 18 plus**

**48%Viura, 32% Malvasía Riojana, 20% Garnacha Blanca**

A lustrous, pale gold in colour, this has a wonderfully appetising nose, combining citrus, orchard and stone fruit, warm pastry underpinned by an authoritative minerality. 5,000 bottles were produced from 12 sites cropped at 1kg of grapes per vine – very low production for a white wine – adding to its intensity. Eight months' maturation in new French oak adds texture and richness, rather than oak perse. The palate is opulent and seductive, tantalising the senses with hints of tangerine, lemon shortcake and vanilla cream. Wafts of wild herbs enhance the nose and palate and the overall balance make this a fine food wine. Beautifully balanced, this is wonderfully poised and elegant.

**Recommended drinking from 2010 to 2017 plus**

**£185/case of 6, in bond UK**

## **2008 Tasting Notes**

### **Predicador**

**Corney & Barrow Score 17 to 18**

**91% Tempranillo, 8% Garnacha Tinta and 1% Viura from 45-yr-old vines**

Now in its fourth vintage, Predicador is an established favourite within the Corney & Barrow team, from its iconic label through to its distinctive style. We are delighted that this now has a white partner. Benjamin had been unable to produce any wine in decent volume when confined by his father's garage but now, with his wonderful new winery, he can be more flexible. With Predicador red and white, as with all of his wines, his standards are exacting. By modestly adding to the production and re-using barrels, he is able to produce a wine at a lower price. This 2008 vintage is deep jet-plum in colour, with a firm, dark cherry rim. The aromatics are very attractive, rich and sweet, combining blueberry, cherry and cassis, all lifted by a citrus tang, reminiscent of old-fashioned marmalade. There are hints of fennel and wild herbs, all reflected in a sensual, warm and inviting palate. Luscious and layered, this is a wonderful translation of Rioja *terroir*.

The name, Predicador (meaning preacher) and the label are inspired by Clint Eastwood's Pale Rider – a film which Benjamin loves.

**Recommended drinking from 2010 to 2018 plus**

**£180/case of 12, in bond UK**

### **La Cueva del Contador**

**Corney & Barrow Score 17 plus to 18 plus**

**100% Tempranillo**

This is the second wine of Contador, a very fine wine in its own right, from 15 different vineyard sites in this vintage. This, in common with La Viña de Andres and Contador, is matured for 18 months in new French oak and is produced from 1.5kg of fruit per vine. There are just 8,000 bottles for the whole world. Almost opaque, plum-cherry in colour and velvet textured, it clings to the glass. The nose is gorgeous, rich in sweet, almost caramelised cherries, complemented by hints of pomegranate and fresh herbs, enriched by layers of mocha cream. The palate is luxurious in texture, full and ripe with beautiful fruit supported by rounded tannins, all complemented by hints of wild herbs, crushed stone minerals and bitter chocolate, all laced by oak. As yet there has been no Cueva which has attained full maturity let alone gone over the edge. We can therefore only

speculate, based on the overall balance, as to how it will age. As ever, it can be enjoyed from the outset but will benefit from cellaring.

**Recommended drinking from 2013 to 2022 plus**

**£250/case of 6, in bond UK**

### **La Viña de Andres**

**Corney & Barrow Score 18 plus to 19**

**100% Tempranillo**

This is a jet-shot plum ruby in colour, almost opaque. The nose is lovely, very pure, a melange of red fruit, bramble and black cherry which achieve a crescendo of freshness and vitality – enticing. The palate is orchestral in its complexity – vivid high notes of pure fruit allied to darker, brooding savoury elements, all punctuated by minerals and herbs. Powerful and harmonious, supported by deft, sprightly tannins, this is liquid decadence – a beautiful wine which is tempting even in this embryonic state but, having had the unique opportunity to taste a vertical, from 2001 through to 2009, it is clear that this will age beautifully. I have never had the occasion to write this in a tasting note before – but it made my colleague Rachel blush! Just 5500 bottles were produced from 1kg of grapes per vine.

**Recommended drinking from 2015 to 2025 plus**

**£415/case of 6, in bond UK**

### **Contador**

**Corney & Barrow Score 19 to 19 plus**

**86% Tempranillo, 14% Garnacha Tinta**

This is a blend which comes from 12 different parcels in 2008, chosen on the basis of the oldest vines and the lowest yields and balancing rounded, structured components with lighter fresher styles, slopes and flatland – all complementary. This is a lustrous plum-cherry in colour, intense and concentrated. Contador reverberates with innate power and complexity, tantalising the taster with a relatively subtle nose, hints of the red and black fruit and mocha which will be revealed on the palate, refreshed by minerals and wild herbs. The palate is multi-layered on attack, reflecting the aromatics suggested on the nose throughout and adding a floral and citrus dimension, all set within an opulent, seductively-textured structure. This is gorgeous and, as always with Benjamin's wines, it bears innate power and muscle with grace and poise. Beautifully focused, this is a very lovely Contador, of which only 4,000 bottles were made, from just 0.5kg of grapes per vine.

**Recommended drinking from 2018 to 2030 plus**

**£985/case of 6, in bond UK**

### **TASTING GUIDE**

Our tasting notes provide full details but, at your request, we have also introduced a clear and simple marking system.

We hope these guidelines assist you in your selection.

**14-16 A very good to excellent wine.**

**16-18 An excellent to outstanding wine.**

**18-20 An outstanding to legendary wine.**

- Wines are judged within their peer group.
- A definitive score of a young wine is almost always impossible. We usually offer a 'spread' (e.g. 14 - 16) which relates to the potential to achieve a higher mark. A plus 'plus' adds further to that potential.
- A score is a summary only. The devil is in the detail, so please focus on the tasting notes.

To order, please call 020 7265 2430 (London), 01638 600 000 (Newmarket),  
01875 321 921 (Edinburgh), 01748 828 640 (Yorkshire) or  
+852 2537 3325 (Hong Kong)