Nordic recommendations

8 Oct 2012 by Luis Guti□rrez

In The Malmö Olympics, I explained why I recently found myself flying to Copenhagen and visiting Malmö in Sweden, where my company is based. Here are some of the great places I ate and drank while there, together with a recommendation from back home in Madrid.

Pho Bo, Vietnamese soup in Sweden

Lunchtime in Spain is later than in the rest of Europe. 13:30 is early lunch here, but quite late in Sweden. When I'm in Sweden some of my workmates start saying how hungry they are at half past eleven! So we arrived in Malmö from Madrid and Granada and needed a place for late lunch. A local Vietnamese restaurant, Mrs Saigon, serves lunch until 15.00. I don't know about lunch hours in Vietnam, but these people could open a branch in Madrid. Not only because of the timetable but also because a few days before we had been discussing on Twitter (aren't discussion forums and even blogs and Facebook being overtaken by Twitter?) whether it was possible to have a nice plate of *pho bo* (or *pho ga* as *bo* is with beef and *ga* is with chicken), that nice restorative Vietnamese noodle soup, in Madrid. We came to the conclusion that it was not possible, despite there being a superb Vietnamese/South East Asian restaurant in Madrid. **Sudestada** is highly recommended to any visitors to Madrid - as is the original branch in Buenos Aires - for those craving real Vietnamese food, but they do not serve *pho*.

Getting back to Malmö, at Mrs Saigon you can have a big bowl of *pho* with a few drops of a really hot chilli sauce which will get you really warm in the Swedish autumn and winter, for 90 SEK, around 10 euros. And it is not that we Spaniards have no idea of *pho*. When my colleagues from the Singapore office come to Sweden they go there for *pho* and rave about the quality, which they say you cannot get in Singapore.

We have been discussing food and wine matching (Jancis and Nick as well as some other friends) in a symposium in Barcelona [about which I will report next week - JR], and in our forum here. Fortunately (some of) the most food-friendly wines are also some of the most sensitively priced ones. On more and more wine lists in restaurants in the UK, US and France you see Muscadet from the Loire, Beaujolais (and other carbonic maceration natural wines), and wines from the Jura!

Jurassic lunch…

I will not bore you with another account of a meal at **Noma**, but I'll comment on what we drank. The wine list has quite a few tempting names (and some holes, like not a single sherry!), but prices are steep. A good way to start the meal is to have a beer as an aperitif. Both here and at the Osteria Francescana in Modena, the sommelier suggests a local craft beer to start. It's refreshingly different, and keeps the bill under control.

There are quite a few of the so-called natural wines, among which there are several from the Jura. For years Overnoy has been the revered name in wine bars such as Le Baratin or Le Verre Volé in Paris. Now a few others have joined him, Ganevat and Bornard among them. Jean François Ganevat returned from Burgundy, where he worked with Jean-Marc Morey in Chassagne, to take over the family domaine in 1998. With 8 ha of vines he produces 35,000 bottles per year, divided into some 25 different labels, therefore there's a very small production of extremely limited cuvées. Even the whites made in barrels that are regularly topped up (*ouillé*) to avoid the development of flor yeast have some of the *voile* tang. Yeast is everywhere and I guess it's inevitable. Not that it bothers me at all. In fact I quite like it.

Ganevat's *ouillé* whites are precise, well delineated, with good acidity, spice and superb intensity. A friend described them as a cross between a Chablis from Raveneau (the precision and acidity) and a Côtes du Jura from Macle (the spiciness), a blend of Chardonnay and declassified barrels from vin jaune. For the record, we had the Cuvée Florine from 2008, pure Chardonnay from young vines planted on limestone. It has great intensity for a young-vine cuvée. Ganevat works biodynamically in the vineyard, presses whole clusters when it comes to whites, and ages them in an assortment of used oak barrels of 400, 300 and 228 litres. The wine is vinified without sulphur, and gets only a minimal dose at bottling time.

An even newer name, also in the Jura, is someone who has already made a reputation for his wines and is one of the new cult figures among the cognoscenti. Philippe Bornard comes from an old vine-growing family. He used to sell his crop to the co-op of Pupillin, the village in the commune of Arbois where he lives. Only in 2005 did he start bottling and selling his own wines. They all bear an orange fox on the white label and, like Ganevat, he produces a considerable number of different cuvées from his 7 ha of vines.

Most of the food served at Noma, as well as in a good majority of modern-cuisine restaurants, is not really in need of red wine. And the food is definitely not appropriate for tannic, concentrated, powerful oaky reds. However, there is always some kind of meat dish at the end of the meal, which could do well with some acidity and a bit of power. Beaujolais is ideal for these occasions. Noma, having a good selection of modern, bio, non-sulphured wines, has good choices in Beaujolais, the region were this trend originated decades ago with Jules Chauvet. We opted for a Fleurie 2009 from Yvon Métras, another name not found in most of the mainstream wine guides, but who is another cult figure whose wines are very much sought after, like those from Jean Foillard or Marcel Lapierre.

As reported here, 2009 was one of the best recent vintages in Beaujolais, where the warm years tend to produce powerful yet balanced wines with the nerve that granitic soils provide. The wine is juicy and supple, often with the characteristic aroma of carbonic maceration method of vinification used in the region. We were also served another beer brewed by the Dane Mikkeller especially for them, called Noma Novel, that appeared in tall champagne glasses and was also a good refreshment before the desserts. As these were not traditional chocolate or fruit dishes but, like the savoury dishes, also had an important vegetal component in them, we didn't have the chance to order the dessert wine we had in mind - in fact the only wine we had been determined to have even before we arrived, as we had peeked at the wine list on their website - but instead finished the various glasses of wine and beer that we still had.

We were so full after lunch - you get 12 small *tapas* that you eat with your fingers and then 10 proper dishes - that after the coffee and some more small bites we needed a walk. Noma's sommelier Mads Kleppe kindly suggested we could take a look at a wine bar called **Ved Stranden 10**, which is only 15 minutes' walk from the restaurant. Make sure you keep this address (it's both the address and the name of the bar) if you are planning on visiting Copenhagen. It's also fairly central, just 15 minutes from the central station or the Tivoli gardens. When we were walking towards the place Jesús Barquín was saying that he thought he had been there before, although he was not 100% sure it was the same place. As soon as we walked in he recognised owner Christian Nedegaard.

It's a wine bar where they also serve some food. It's very informal and friendly, with a number of rooms that make you feel you're at someone's house. You pick your bottle and sit down at your table to drink it. The selection of wines focuses on unsulphured wines, and they do have the sherries from Equipo Navazos. Yes, Barquín had been there before, giving a tasting of their wines. Seeing that the selection was actually quite similar to the one at Noma, we thought of the sweet wine we never got to drink there, a vin de liqueur from Pierre Overnoy, the absolute guru of Jura wine, the pope of non-sulphur, and the figure who inspired so many young growers in the Jura and elsewhere.

This vin de liqueur is what in the Jura is usually called Macvin du Jura, a blend of unfermented must and wine spirit (marc). The marc tends to be aged before it's blended, and then the blend is also aged in barrel. I don't know why Overnoy calls his Vin de Liqueur instead of Macvin, but he has a reputation for being somewhat eccentric. And this is a wine that is not officially sold. Like so many of his small-production special lots of older vintages that seem to be endless, it's only distributed to friends. But then it seems like all his wines are sold like that.

The alcohol is quite evident on the nose, and this can bother some people. It does smell of *grappa* or *aguardiente* (or *akvavit*, given where we are), but I find it quite pleasant. The mouth is very powerful, and the sweetness is balanced by the alcohol and very good acidity. Not an everyday bottle, but really addictive as a digestif. I'd had the luck to drink it a couple of times before, and I'm already craving the next one.

… and nose-to-tail dinner

To balance the excess chlorophyll from Noma we decided to have dinner at **Bastard**. Yes, the place is called that, but the Swedes put the emphasis on the last syllable and somehow make it sound different. For many of us this is the best restaurant in Malmö and in southern Sweden, a place inspired by Fergus Henderson and St John in London. It is also the most popular place in town at the moment, so make sure you book in advance. They are open only for dinner Tuesday to Saturday and they also have a lively bar which is actually the heart of the restaurant where you can eat or just have drinks.

The décor is modern semi-industrial: white tiles, old chairs and tables, very high shelves, mirrors, paintings and anatomy posters (from animals) and a huge cartoon face all framed by the refrigeration pipes. The room is big, with high ceilings, you can see the kitchen. They also have a garden ideal for al fresco dining in spring and summer. Food is powerful, mainly around pork, offal and organic produce. They call it European home cooking with a twist.

The menu changes daily according to the market, and it's a simple page written in Swedish that the waiter will read to you aloud in English. Depending on the day you might find ox heart, pork belly or a daring lamb tongue salad, but they always have at least one fish, often cod. The superb bread and butter merit a special mention. They are famous for their Bastard Planka, a plate of charcuterie which would be familiar to people from Spain (so we skipped it this time) that includes Italian coppa, rillettes, saucisson from Lyon, Spanish chorizo, gherkins and a provocative knife stabbed in the middle of the wooden plate.

There are modern wines from all over the world, with a Tarlant Brut Zero by the glass and well-chosen bottles that don't break your piggy-bank. You can drink Muscadet from l'Ecu, Beaujolais from Lapierre, Languedoc from Clavel, a spicy Crozes-Hermitage from Ferraton or again some Jura, this time from Château d'Arlay.

Ahhh! Copenhagen and Malmö, south-east Asian cuisine, Noma, nose-to-tail eating and wines from the Jura…

Mrs Saigon
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http://www.mrs-saigon.se/english/english.html

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