

## Vintage in Bierzo part 1 - introducing DJP

18 Dec 2012 by Tanya Garnham

*JR intro to come*

*Tanya completed the 2012 vintage in Villafranca del Bierzo in the north west of Spain with Descendientes de J Palacios, a winery associated with Álvaro Palacios in Priorat and Palacios Remondo in Rioja, to gain hands-on experience after finishing her Foundation Diploma in Wine Production at Plumpton College, UK. 2011 saw shorter stints in the wineries and vineyards of Gran Clos in Priorat and Furleigh Estate in Dorset. Her last eight years in the industry have otherwise been about marketing, teaching and selling wine for various companies in the UK, France, Spain, India and Dubai.*

This is a report of my experience at Descendientes de J Palacios which will, I hope, enable you to follow the winemaking process through from picking the grapes to the end of fermentation, which is when I left. Perhaps you'll even start making your own wine at home after reading this because what I learned is that it isn't that complicated! Not at this winery anyway - and the wines are amazing. The vintage was actually a real eye-opener because, at school and at some of the other wineries I have visited, making wine has always seemed far more complicated because of all the additions. Here, it's literally about the grapes.

### **About Descendientes de J Palacios (DJP)**

To paraphrase an employee, DJP is run by God, Ricardo and Jesús - in that order. 'God' is Álvaro Palacios, 'Ricardo' is Ricardo Palacios (pictured) and 'Jesús' is actually the name of the winery ops manager (more commonly known as Chus).

In fact, Álvaro and Ricardo are co-proprietors of DJP, which is run by Ricardo, who is also the winemaker. Of course Álvaro does visit, although less frequently than before 'now that he trusts me!' - in Ricardo's words!

Descendientes de J Palacios was started in 1999 following a visit by Ricardo to the region. (This photo of the Bierzo region was taken from the Peña del Seo, the second highest point in the area at 1,680 m.) He apparently fell in love with the area, thought it would be a great place to make quality wine, spoke to Álvaro (who had visited in 1985 to sell wine barrels in order to fund his winery in Priorat!) about a joint venture, and Bob's your uncle. The winery is named after José Palacios, Álvaro's dad and Ricardo's granddad, but is generally known as 'deh khota peh' (DJP in Spanish).

DJP make five wines: Pétalos, Corullón (pronounced 'koruyon'), Moncerbal (pronounced 'montherval'), Las Lamas and La Faraona, in order of ascending price point and descending availability. Fields Morris & Verdin is the UK importer.

### **DJP and biodynamics**

DJP is in practice (although is no longer certified) biodynamic. Ricardo says that the Bierzo region is conducive to biodynamics because of its inherent structure of self-sufficiency. Traditionally each household grew its own fruit, vegetables and grain, reared its own animals for meat and dairy and had a small plot of vines from which to make wine. Households were for the most part self-contained and relied very little on inputs, which is a facet of biodynamics. While this lifestyle has become less apparent over the years, it isn't uncommon to see chickens in gardens, and vegetables in the spot where a lawn or a flower bed would be at in the UK. The photo above shows Hornija's communal *homo*, where the villagers still bake bread.

To my regret, I was never invited to 'the farm' in Corullón to see any biodynamic (BD) practices in action, but that is likely because there was nothing to see while I was there; BD preparations are generally used in spring and autumn so it was the wrong time of year. I did, however, see cow horns in the *almacen* (the place where the vineyard team starts and ends its days), and was told that chemicals have no place at DJP because of the combination of climate and low-density vineyards.

Ricardo follows the fruit/leaf/flower/root day BD calendar for applying preparations, but is not a stickler, as he does not follow it for harvest or for when he tastes the wines with visitors (wines are supposedly more open, exuberant and fruity on fruit days). I suspect Ricardo thinks it has all become a bit commercial as he did mention that there was an iPhone app for the calendar. Or perhaps it is that good wines show well no matter what the day?

With or without certification, Ricardo says his goal is 'to be happy and to make good wine biodynamically'. He is interested in a healthy environment, the people he works with, and the rural lifestyle of Bierzo. He is not interested in winemakers who use biodynamic preparations without feeling, simply in order to be biodynamic, because the result, he thinks, is bad wine. 'What's the point?', he asks.

*Continued in part 2 tomorrow.*