

## 2012 wine books - regions, and a domaine

23 Dec 2012 by Paul O'Doherty

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### **Sherry, Manzanilla & Montilla** **A Guide to the Traditional Wines of Andalucía**

Peter Liem and Jesús Barquín

Manutius

£19/\$29.95

In the past few years, sherry has had a bit of a renaissance in the niche market, much of it driven by the progressive Consejo Regulador of Jerez and its advertisement campaigns and the arrival of the 'tapas bar' phenomenon that has struck many cities around the world. Along with a night enjoying some hospitality in one's 'local', imagining oneself at a table in Jerez de la Frontera or Sanlúcar de Barrameda, the mood has often been enhanced by a glass of Fino or Amontillado as one peruses the menu. And this, as Peter Liem and Jesús Barquín point out, without any serious sherry education being dispensed to the masses in recent years, such has been the shortage of wine books covering sherry. One thinks back to Julian Jeffs' *Sherry*, which was written in 1961 and updated and republished for four decades as one of the more popular books on the subject until now. Locked into this battle with the past, it is the authors' assertion that people should drink sherry now and not reminisce over, for instance, what one's Great Aunt Georgina may have thought of what is essentially one of the most fruit-driven and great-value wines on the planet.

Writing in an informative, upbeat style that's a little over-written at times, the authors are an unusual combination: Liem is an American wine writer and the pen behind ChampagneGuide.net, while Barquín is professor of criminal law and director of the Institute of Criminology at the University of Granada. What is it about the wine trade that attracts an inordinate number of wine writers from the legal profession? Or, specifically, writers on sherry? Jeffs was also a man known for his days at the bar. Barquín is also a regular contributor to *The World of Fine Wine* as well as to the wine and food sections of *El Mundo*. A little more controversial is the fact that he is the founder of sherry producer Equipo Navazos. While it's unusual for wine producers to co-write an overview of their region, which may leave them open to accusations of favouritism, Liem acknowledges this in the introduction, stating that, while the two writers have collaborated on the general sections on sherry, Liem is solely responsible for the profiles on the various bodegas.

The book itself is not a history book, although it does offer a brief history to begin with, including, for instance, a shot at whether sack was sweet or dry, offering the views of Jeffs versus Hugh Johnson and an overview of the Rumasa debacle. After that there are sections on Marco de Jerez and Montilla-Moriles, the DO zones, the terroir and vineyards, grape varieties, the influence of flor in the cellar, barrel ageing, the solera system, types of sherry, bottling, the influence of architecture, byproducts of sherry production and how best to enjoy sherry.

In between these sections and an extensive list of the principal bodegas, those of historical importance and tips on visiting the area, there is a chapter on what the future holds. In real terms the future, while not apocalyptic, does seem to hold continued alarming falls in sales, much of it in the industry's bulk engine-room. Far more optimistically, the fine sherry market is buoyant, as witness the tapas-bar culture and niche markets which continue. At current prices, sherry is tremendous value, particularly when put alongside other fine wines from other regions around the world. In what is ultimately a well-written, well-researched and thoughtful modern take on sherry, and a warning against the dangers of globalisation within the wine world, the questions this book asks boil down to whether the sherry fraternity are willing to go back to the more traditional ways of making sherry with a greater emphasis on the vineyard and terroir, as the Champenois have recently addressed, and whether it is possible to build a fine-wine industry on the shifting sands or albariza when sherry continues to die a slow death?

### **The Finest Wines of Germany** **A Regional Guide to the Best Producers and Their Wines**

Stephan Reinhardt

Fine Wine Editions

£20/\$32

Following a similar style to the other editions in this series, Reinhardt, a regular contributor to *The World of Fine Wine* and a former editor of the German/Swiss review *Weinwisser* recently moved to *Vinum*, sets out in his early chapters his personal Riesling journey and what has brought him to love Riesling like many a wine journalist through the ages. He pushes the view that Riesling is now cool. What is it about this 'wine journalist paradox' that despite Riesling's popularity among wine journalists and other professionals, it's never been quite as proportionally romanced by wine drinkers, with many wine shops saying it still remains a hard hand-sell? That said, as Reinhardt points out, exports to the US increased in both value and volume in 2010, while exports to other countries around the world are also on the increase.

Reinhardt also includes a section on current trends, a short history 'from sugar to terroir', and the age-old conundrum for the wine-drinker: understanding German wine and the complications of the 1971 German wine law, what Reinhardt calls the difficulty of 'explaining an issue as complex as Goethe's *Faust* in six pages'. Thus, there is an explanation of the system devised by the Verband Deutscher Qualitäts- und Prädikatsweingüter (VDP) that comes into operation from the 2012 vintage with its four levels of quality, similar to the Burgundian system: VDP Grosse Lage (similar to grand cru); VDP Erste Lage (similar to premier cru); VDP Ortswein (similar to village); and finally, VDP Gutswein (similar to Bourgogne régional). Following on from this, the narrative explores soil, grape varieties and viticulture, before turning its attention to the profiles.

Each selection of profiles begins with an overview of 10 of the 13 German wine regions. By his own admission, Reinhardt has not included vineyards from Saale-Unstrut, Hessische Bergstrasse and Mittelrhein, acknowledging that, although some very good wines are produced there, 'I could not find a producer whose wines are consistently inspiring enough to merit a profile'. The profiles range from Schloss Proschwitz in Saxony to Weingut Jean Stodden in the Ahr and include photographs of owners and tasting notes for recent vintages. Overall, this is a solid timely overview of the region produced to the publisher's usual high standards.

***Port and the Douro***  
***Third Edition***

Richard Mayson  
Infinite Ideas  
£30/\$49

Nine years have gone by since Richard Mayson published the previous edition of this, the only book on port and the Douro worth having. Once more it's a fantastic read from the get-go, bringing together the history of the Douro from the early days of trade between Portugal and England to the 34,000 growers farming in the area in 2011.

Mayson focuses on the first port shippers, the early vintages, war, the men and women who shaped the Douro, disease, the birth of Mateus rosé, revolution, and the Casa do Douro saga. With the history lesson completed, the narrative switches to the vineyards, vines, the important issues of climate, the *beneficio*, vineyard layout and grafting, before turning to the grape varieties and the prominent quintas.

The middle section investigates the process of making port and the balancing of tradition and modern approaches to making port with the advances in modern technology. The different styles of port and vintages are also included as are vintage reports from 2011 back to 1844.

The last section discusses the key port producers and shippers, the wines of the Douro Valley, and offers some nuggets of tourist advice. Finally, Mayson looks to the future and spells out the obvious, that with port sales having peaked in 2000; three markets - France, Holland and Belgium - accounting for nearly 60% of sales, costs spiralling and new blood unwilling to take up the challenge that has never been easy for their forefathers, the future is extremely precarious. And that's before you consider the property market that can't give away vineyards for love nor money, and the overplanting that has provided an oversupply of grapes that will never be sold. Also, despite the better transportation links, tourism just doesn't provide the volume that, at least in the short term, could provide a respite. On the plus side, as Mayson acknowledges, the 'special categories' continue to grow, although it must be added that the Symington family and The Fladgate Partnership alone, alarmingly, control two-thirds of that business. Like the sherry business in Spain, the port-wine trade provides plenty for everyone who loves fortified wine to worry about.

***Great, Grand and Famous Champagnes ... Behind the Bubbles***  
Jayne Powell, Fritz Gubler and Dannielle Viera

Arbon Publishing  
£37.45 /\$60.50

This particular homage to champagne opens with a history that, for the most part, is entertaining if a little ropery in parts: for instance, a picture of the portrait of Madame de Pompadour carries the inscription that 'she was mistress to Louis XIV', when, of course, she was mistress to Louis XV. Picking up on these little faults may be considered churlish if we weren't discussing a subject where dates and vintages are integral.

Following on from this, the authors focus on the great champagne houses from Gosset to Bruno Paillard with brief overviews, potted histories and a tasting note to go with each, before going on to offer a chapter on 'the women behind the bubbles'. Madame Clicquot, Madame Olry-Roederer, Madame Bollinger and Carol Duval-Leroy are just some of the ladies featured.

Following the historical theme, there are also sections on the popularity of champagne, champagne and art, champagne posters, advertisement campaigns, James Bond, and television series *Absolutely Fabulous*. The last section on the science of champagne includes entries on the champagne process, the region and the various subregions, including maps. Along the way there are some lovely pictures that make one want to visit the region itself. Overall, this is a glossy, colourful coffee-table exhibit that's not too taxing and very easy to follow.

### ***Le Domaine de la Romanée-Conti***

Gert Crum  
Lannoo  
£90/\$144

Drum roll, maestro, if you please. I present the biggest book (*Wine Grapes* is fatter but not as tall) that didn't fit through the letterbox this year. This is a big, bold, heavy creation that doesn't necessarily need a coffee table as it could easily be the sitting room centrepiece itself if rested on two stools in a small apartment. The tome is beautifully illustrated by photographer Jan Bartelman, with gorgeous moody pictures of the Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and its environs throughout the seasons. With detailed maps, Crum, a Dutch writer, goes into some detail on the historical aspects of the domaine while assessing what makes it the phenomenon it has become. If it weren't such a bulky production, or if Google Maps was yet to be invented, it would allow one to pinpoint exactly where in Burgundy the great parcels of land are to be found without driving up and down the N74 between Beaune and Dijon like a lunatic looking for directions to the right tertiary backwater.

There are also chapters on the importance of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, rootstocks, the significance and diversity of terroir, the emphasis on organic practices, biodynamics, the attention to detail, the market, and a line-up of grands crus from Corton to Le Montrachet. Towards the end, Michael Broadbent and Allen Meadows supply the tasting notes going back two centuries. Overall, this is a fabulously 'grand' production if a little over-written, repetitive and flowery in parts, but it's still a fabulous read, provided you've got a big enough table to get your elbows around it.