



Wine Portraits

# Toni Sánchez-Ortiz



DOQ Priorat / DO Tarragona / Table wine

# Toni Sànchez-Ortiz

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Tarragona, 2016



# Prologue

This new series by the URV's Publications Unit, *Retrats de Vi* (Wine Portraits), focuses on several oenologists, all trained at the URV, who use their professional and personal experience to explain what their work consists of, their objectives and the challenges they face. But, above all, they show us their love of a profession that has deep roots in our land.

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Faculty of Oenology, this series is also a tribute to the lecturers and the administrative and service staff who have worked there. During this period, the various courses on offer have trained more than a thousand professionals, more than half of whom graduated in Oenology. Particular mention should be made of the staff, who have always responded to the changes introduced and adapted the courses and the research to the new social and economic challenges. The latest example of this is the introduction in the 2015-2016 academic year of the new Erasmus-Mundus Master's Degree in Wine and Tourism, the first one to be coordinated by our university.

The university in the 21st century has three main missions: the first, to teach top-quality courses that provide people with knowledge, abilities and skills; the second, to carry out cutting-edge research that generates knowledge and is transferred through the first mission – training – and the third, to boost economic, social and regional development and lead the way to the knowledge society.

The URV consciously combines its clear role in the region as the main expression of its commitment to society with the international scope of its research. This connection between top-quality education, cutting-edge research, and the social and economic reality of the southernmost regions of Catalonia

has become the driving force behind the development of the University. In particular, oenology has been one of the roots that has linked the URV to the region. The protagonists of *Retrats de Vi* will certainly provide this joint vision.

Josep Anton Ferré Vidal  
Rector of the Universitat Rovira i Virgili

*Estenc la mà i no hi ets.  
Però el misteri d'aquesta teva absència se'm revela  
més dòcilment i tot del que pensava.  
No tornaràs mai més, però en les coses  
i en mi mateix hi hauràs deixat l'empremta  
de la vida que visc, no solitari  
sinó amb el món i tu per companyia,  
ple de tu fins i tot quan no et recordo,  
i amb la mirada clara del qui estima  
sense esperar cap llei de recompensa.*

M. Martí i Pol

*I reach out and you are not there.  
But the mystery of your absence is revealed  
More gently than I could ever have thought.  
You will never return, but in things  
and in myself you will have left the mark  
of the life I live, not alone  
but with the world and you for company,  
full of you even when I do not remember you,  
and with the clear gaze of someone who loves  
with no expectation of the law of reward.*

M. Martí i Pol

TONI SÀNCHEZ-ORTIZ'S ROOTS TO THE LAND can be traced back to his birthplace, the small town of Organyà in L'Alt Urgell where the first literary text in Catalan was written more than eight centuries ago. Its close and peaceful rural environment is still important to him and it has been a feature of his professional life ever since he finished his degree in oenology at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona. He was the first oenologist from the URV to complete his training with an Erasmus grant at the Université Victor Segalen in Bordeaux and in just a few years he has developed a wide-ranging vision of the world of wine without the advantage of being the heir to a company in the sector.

He picked up the idea of 'no risk, no fun' from the Americans and it was in this spirit that he created the first beer made from Catalan Grenache, revitalised a one-hectare vineyard that has been growing Carignan grapes for over a hundred years in El Molar, made wine from Sauvignon Blanc just a few kilometres from the sea, and produced a varietal wine from Merlot in Santes Creus and from Syrah in Salamanca.

His wines have an unmistakeable hallmark, which comes from his search for optimal grape ripeness. They can be quickly recognised by an in-depth analysis of their breadth and length. He has an innate curiosity for research into viticulture and oenological education, which he manages to satisfy by teaching on the Professional Sommelier Course and being a member of the URV's Viticulture Research Group, based at the Department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology of the Faculty of Oenology.

Admirably, he is keen to keep learning and developing his ideas, while asking new questions about climate change and how to adapt varieties to the climate. He does this, however, in Australia and New Zealand, a long way from



the environment that he is most familiar with. For three seasons now, he has found emotional equilibrium in the new world, an equilibrium that he strives to attain in the plant. Whenever he comes back from the most technologically advanced oenological regions he is deeply impressed by the old world and, in particular, by the triangle of Catalan regions where winemaking is an act of heroism with the common denominator of the slatey soils. In his personal projects in the DOQ Priorat and Montsant, and his consultancies in the DO Tarragona, Toni Sànchez-Ortiz gives to wine what he has learned from his humble origins: a connection with nature and an uncountable number of hours of observation and interaction with the environment. Such noble and sincere statements as “biodynamic viticulture is a scientific vision of age-old traditions” belong to a past that is also the present.

One of the key figures in his past is his maternal grandmother, who died at the beginning of 2015. She taught him everything he knows about the rural life of the Pyrenees, was always ready with advice and always went with him to cut back the vines in Saurí. The poem by Miquel Martí i Pol at the beginning of this text is dedicated to her memory. He is aware that she will live on in him forever more and will be reflected in the way he works and in his relationship with the vines: “You express the best of yourself though wine.” He applies this principle as an oenologist, an olive grower, flying winemaker, consultant, and the sensible and measured person that he is. He is a versatile professional with the gift of understanding and sharing his other innate qualities. The Ethos Priorat group for thought and reflection, of which Toni Sànchez-Ortiz is a member, describes him as “an alchemist who uses science to confirm his intuitive relationship with nature.”





“I’ve got through life on my wits”

## The Montsant



The only son of a humble family from the Catalan Pyrenees, Toni Sánchez-Ortiz was born in 1978 and graduated from the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona at the age of 23. His parents, both employees of the company Taurus, did not have the opportunity to go to school and could not advise him on his studies, so he had to get through his first years of education as best he could.

“I had a well developed internal world, I was a single child and rural life encouraged me to study a lot because I was good at it. I immersed myself in books on physics and chemistry, but I also felt curious about my surroundings. I had a passion for catching insects, I had a vivid imagination and I was always doing calculations with gestures and symbols in the air.” As a young boy he stood out for being particularly creative and imaginative, anxious to interact with the environment and himself.

"I first thought that I would study medicine and podology because I had seen my grandmother having her feet treated at home and I didn't want to sow potatoes and corn, or harvest the olives. I wanted to leave the land behind and get into the laboratory." The rural life that has been so important to him and which he now misses during his long absences from the Pyrenean valley that saw him grow was to influence his beginnings as a professional.

He arrived in Barcelona wanting to get away from what now he is most attracted to. "I grew up surrounded by old people. They were my teachers. I inherited the desire to listen to them. Learning from their experience is a part of my liturgy. My maternal grandmother taught me everything I know. She brought me up and always taught me to fight for what I believed in and look to the future, even in the bad times. But above all she encouraged me to help others." The memories he has of his grandmother relentlessly bubble up from within: "She taught me how to make infusions from elderberry and mint, and the fruit marmalade that I still make now. You should have met her. We danced together at the festival of Saint Maginus four years ago in Tarragona." He speaks of her with great sensitivity and is quick to point out that his is no hippy attitude. "It's like the biodynamics in viticulture: it's a scientific vision of age-old traditions. We used to put strings of garlic next to the olive trees that we had at an altitude of 1,500 metres, we would use ash instead of sulphur because it dries things up and protects against fungus, we made bonfires ..."

These customs and traditions are the roots of his current winemaking practice, the legacy of a past that was interrupted by several years of separation from rurality. He began higher education at the University of

Barcelona with a degree in chemistry, which he combined with learning German. When he finished his degree he worked for the Frape Behr Group in the Zona Franca in Barcelona. After meeting Anna Molins in the bar of the Faculty of Pharmacy and visiting the Oktoberfest, he went to live in Germany, a period in which he discovered the fascination of the world of wine. "It wasn't my sector, but I'm a romantic," he said on more than one occasion during the conversation. In Germany he worked first at Henkel and then at Schwarzkopf. It was probably the cold nights and his desire to find some sort of social life that triggered everything. "While I was in Germany, I enrolled on a course in wines and spirits, because I thought that if I could begin to understand these things I would be able to work in a wine laboratory." His thoughts were exclusively on the chemistry of life; he was not aware that he would eventually give it up.


It was in Henkel's library that he first found out about the degree in oenology at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona. "While I was looking for books on chemistry in German I came across the URV's website and after I'd been into it a thousand times I decided to enrol. I still remember that keyboard with all the letters in a different order and vowels with diaereses on them. Everybody said that I didn't stand a chance if I didn't come from the world of wine and that I wouldn't have a nose for aromas. And, in the spirit of the great adventurers that men from the mountains are assumed to be, from Germany he set about enrolling in the second-cycle degree in oenology. A year-and-a-half-long programme that he began when he was just over 21 years old.

From Organyà to Barcelona, from Barcelona to Düsseldorf and from Düsseldorf to Tarragona. “Finally I decided to study oenology, which is the biology of the vine. Until then nobody had told me anything about the microorganisms of the land, the effects of watering the soil a little more or a little less, the skimming of white wines. I was not the heir to a wine fortune nor did I have any contacts with the world of wine. Only with the country and rural life.” He came full circle by beginning to study oenology and returning to his origins. “Working the land preserves the landscape.”

He is sentimental. But he has supplemented his wits with effort, dedication and perseverance. And also multi-tasking and flexibility. At just 36 years old, he has already worked for 22. He knows because the paperwork that can be such a nuisance reminded him just a few days ago.







## I realised that if we were to understand plants, we could have to measure them in extreme conditions

“There were about forty of us on the course. The beginning of oenology was boom time at the URV.” One by one he recalls his classmates, whose careers he has followed with interest: Miquel Palau, now working for Abadal, Judith Llop for Cellers Morlanda, Jaume Martí for Sant Josep Wines, Josep Maria Gil Poblet for Codorniu and many more. Of the time he spent at university he particularly remembers the personal conviction to learn more about viticulture: the vine and the grapes, the climate, the soil, the varieties and the human touch. “I think that all this has been lost to the modern food industry. Students should be taught more about how to work the land. Learning about how to design yeasts is fine, but the essence is the *terroir* and it is being given less and less importance, largely because of the economics of evolution.”

This reflection quickly led him on to education and business: “Professionals are not prepared to work the land. They don’t want to do their work experience in a winery because it means having to go out into the fields and spend their time tending vines. In El Solà d’Ares we have a boy – Marc Freixas – who is studying gardening and horticulture in Reus. He loves the land and is very attached to it. He is very interested in landscaping and its cultural and human effects, but we are not getting any oenologists.” Somewhat shamefully he says that the last oenologist who worked at Solà d’Ares “left because he was too proud to work on the vines.”

“The practical sessions in the fields were with the lecturer Agustí Villarroya on Saturdays. I didn’t mind going at the weekend because I knew I would learn something; learning from working professionals is the way forward because they show you reality as it is at that moment.” Just like a SWOT analysis, learning obliges you to confront threats, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities. “Going out into the field every day may seem boring and repetitive but understanding every new harvest and what happens to the vine every day enables you to understand viticulture and establish the conditions in which to practise it in one way or another.”

At the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, the Mas dels Frares Experimental Centre has provided this fundamental learning experience since the early 1990s. Since then, 17 autochthonous and foreign varieties have been planted on the 5 hectares of land so that future oenologists can practise harvesting the grapes every year and bottling the wine with the URV label. “Mas dels Frares makes it possible for students to tend vines and explore practices that are often difficult to understand in the classroom.”

University life brings back many happy memories but some episodes take pride of place. For example, the first time he worked with the lecturer Montse Nadal on measuring the water potential of plants. “I remember doing a practical session by myself at two o’clock in the afternoon in the blazing heat. I realised that vines have to be observed in extreme conditions if they are to be understood. It was just then that I started to take an interest in viticulture. While everybody else was in the winery, in the heat of the midday sun I discovered hidden passions in a place that was far from ideal for measuring the water stress of vines.”



## You express the best of yourself through wine

“I asked the lecturer Olga Bustos about applying for an Erasmus grant and going to Bordeaux for a year to finish my oenology studies. Without really meaning to, I became the first second-cycle student to be trained abroad.” Unconsciously, he paved the way for new generations of oenologists who sought inspiration from the old world’s cradle of viticulture and, more specifically, one of the wine regions with the longest history, the region of the great chateaux, the *négociants* (wine merchants) and the *crus classés*. It was during this period that he became convinced of the fundamental role of the *terroir* and the analysis of autochthonous varieties.

“I’m quite good at languages and I think that this helped me get on in the world of wine while I was training. And now that I am working professionally in the field, a command of languages helps me to understand the culture and the personality of the different markets.” He learned German while he was doing his degree in chemistry at the University of Barcelona; he started learning French at primary school in Organyà and perfected it at the Official School of Languages before he left for Bordeaux; later he learned English but he now speaks it fluently. It is no coincidence that he can also get by in Portuguese since he is fascinated by the region of Porto.

He drove to Bordeaux in his Renault R5, bought for him by his father who had never learned to drive, so it was a new toy. He set about studying oenology with genuine enthusiasm. “I am so fortunate.” From the very beginning

he was captivated by the students who came from all sorts of places and backgrounds, he tasted and discovered wines from all over the world, and he organized short weekend trips to visit France's Apellations d'Origine Controlée such as Calvados, the Loire and Charente.

"I was in the same room as the gurus of the wine world whose texts I used to read. I was being taught by them. I was lucky enough to have M. Gayon and M. Glories, both of whom have now passed away, as my teachers." This direct access to knowledge in the lecture theatres of the *Université Victor Segalen* in Bordeaux had a deep impact on him. "The French value ethics and aesthetics. Here, on the other hand, we do not appreciate things from far-off places, just like we don't listen to old people. There is a considerable cultural distance between us and France, and it's this that makes us lag behind in terms of wine." While he was in France, he observed that oenology was taking over from viticulture. "Things are being restructured and the trend is not going to stop here because oenologists want to spend eight hours in the winery not in the vineyards or fields. The fields can be monitored when there is homogeneity, but if there isn't you have to spend a lot of time outside."

When he finished his studies in Bordeaux, he returned to Catalonia where he was awarded a grant to work during harvest time at the Mas dels Frares Experimental Centre, then under the management of Joan Miquel Canals. "In Constantí you come into contact with reality." This is when the skill of balancing science, technique and art comes into play. "Vines are vines and they respond to stimuli. It is one of the few crops that reacts to man's intervention. It is the most widespread crop in the world, the one that has been most studied, and it has a big effect on the economy. And

every year the result is different, depending on how the year has evolved.”

In France he learned the importance of respecting the vintage, which many producers wanted to apply to Catalan wine. After all, wines are the expression of their time and the synthesis of the oenologist’s character. “We produce different wines because we want to express different plots of land, maturities and varieties.”

Of his period of formal training, one of the figures who was to make a lasting impression was the oenologist M. Claude Gros, consultant of Château La Négly, who produces the wine *La porte du ciel*. “He is a particularly sensitive professional who showed me the importance of predicting the point of optimal maturity. This is the key to everything: you must know what it is and which wine you want to make.” Gros is a flying winemaker consultant who “knows a lot about everything and has also studied chemistry.” “He’s the sort of person who explains things inside out.”

At this point Toni shows us that he is a born teacher. On some paper he sketches the evolution of the aromas and tannins in grapes. At the beginning of the harvest period, the aromas are of fresh fruit and some winemakers pick them at this point, when they are at their peak. Others, by imitation, begin soon afterwards and make the mistake of picking the grapes when the curve is on the way down. Solà d’Ares takes a risk and waits a little while longer for a second peak – phenolic ripeness – which gives notes of mature fruit. “I learned all about the maturity curve on a flight to Australia. It’s such a long journey – sometimes up to 35 hours – that you have time to read and discover things that you didn’t know but thought you did. This allows us to understand and take in what is happening.”

## HANDS

"I envy birds  
because they have wings  
– but they do not have hands.  
I envy the trees  
because they have branches  
– but they do not have hands or nails...  
I have envied birds,  
but my hands  
are strong,  
hey love,  
give and accept  
I want hands  
and I do not want wings!"

Montserrat Abelló

What do your hands tell you?

**Experiences – Life – Sacrifice**

And what about the hands of another oenologist?

**Tannins – Touching and feeling wine**

A sommelier's hands?

**Movement – Show – Sleight of hand**

A teacher's hands?

**Solitude – Internal knowledge – Chalk, dryness**

And a wine critic's hands?

**Ink – Writing – Reflection**

300L

200L

100L

#1



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WINE AND LIFE'S WORK



## I apply past cultural practices to the land, but am not esoteric

2 January 2015. We have arranged to meet in El Molar, next to the stone welcoming people to the Priorat town known for its grindstones. Although the temperatures are freezing first thing in the morning, it promises to be a beautiful day. The streets are deserted, the windows of a green R4 are webbed with frost, the first tractor of the day leaves its garage, the houses are still steaming after ten days of pleasure and intensity in the kitchen. I instantly fall in love with the rural way of life.

“The first 12 days of the year predict the weather for the next 12 months. Today is sunny so February is going to be sunny as well,” says Toni Sánchez firmly. Observing and forecasting the weather is another of his skills, as is the lunar calendar.

It is Earth day. The new moon means the work must be done in the fields on the roots, soil and wood: planting, weeding, fertilizing, pruning small trees. Toni has already planned the days he is going to spend on pruning with Benaissa Bouschik and Marc Freixas in accordance with the lunar calendar. Today it's fieldwork at the farms Les Sorts and Els Figuerals del Molar; next week it's the turn of the farm Els Bessons in Torroja.

Despite his hectic lifestyle, he never loses touch with the vine. He is there for one, two or five hours, as long as he needs to acquire greater understanding of the plant's life cycle, almost as if he were exploring himself. “I try to understand what happens to the plant, as if it were the human body.”



The first time he harvested grapes in El Priorat as an oenologist was in Gratallops with Sílvia Puig. “I was from the Pyrenees and the land around here, the Mediterranean mountain, was unfamiliar to me.” It soon became clear to him that he would have to make his own way in life and in 2007 he founded the company El Solà d’Ares. “I was looking for old vines because I didn’t want to leave El Priorat and this small, one-hectare farm was abandoned. I started working on Les Sorts in 2007. The fact that it’s a narrow plot means that we have to work manually, although we would have done even if it were wider. We’ve made it into an ecological site, with the plants on the clay soils that are a feature of this area – the DO Montsant – and a surprising 100-year-old Carignan.”

He looks captivated by the plot of land that he is about to prune while he pulls up dead vines with some large scissors. He shows me how to graft the *vitis vinifera* onto the rootstock, patiently using raffia to tie the two pieces of wood together that will become one and give their fruit. In the vineyard he proves to be able and skillful, every movement and gesture showing daring and enthusiasm.

“This land used to belong to someone who lived in El Molar and worked as a diviner. All the villagers thought he was a bit strange but I had no trouble in coming to an agreement with him.” I think of his grandmother and how Toni appreciates all those who have left their mark on him. He speaks of the land as if it had been a gift: “This plot has never given me any problems of drought or dry periods. I’m content to use what it gives to make a single barrel.”

The demands he makes are fair. He is aware of the limitations. His maxim is “less is more”. One hectare of old vines for a single barrel, for his bottles of Saurí Vinyes

Velles. While he talks of his project, he points out all the details he comes across. “Unlike Grenache, the lower Carignan buds are less fertile and they have to be pruned higher up. I practise renewal pruning and use traditional cultural practices, but I try not to be esoteric.”

Les Sorts is a farm with old Carignan grapes, but surprisingly the southern rows are grey Carignan and *Sumoll*, and he has also inherited a few Grenache vines. “There are only three rows and when there are enough shoots I’ll start making wine. I like the wines from Banyuls very much. They are made from grey Carignan and Grenache, so if some of these varieties are planted here we could think about doing something along those lines.”

Nothing is left to chance. It is romanticism, respect, duty to the nature of the land and the faithful expression of this nature.

### El Solà d’Ares: Vines, olive trees and personality

“I want to define the varieties just as they are, without geographical or administrative limits

El Solà d’Ares is his own personal project. Wine, olive trees and cereals are the three crops of the Mediterranean arc that he chose to begin working with. As far as wine is concerned, he began by purchasing the plot of land with old Carignan in El Molar. Three years after bringing it back to life, the first bottle of DO Montsant wine was on the market. “Excellent wines are the result of a deep understanding of the land.” Quite able to take on all these projects of his own and throw himself body and soul into consultancies, Toni Sánchez is

a jack-of-all-trades. However, in regions that are at once so varied and so close geographically, he is still unaware of his unlimited capacity to create a range of products that are clearly connected and use just a few words to tell stories. For example, the name he has given to his wines – Saurí – which means diviner in Arabic.

“In the Middle Ages it was a profession; now it is the pseudo-science of searching for water with a pendulum.” His curiosity has prompted him to get in touch with the diviners of Catalonia, led by the anthropologist Rosa M. Canela:

Someone has the gift of healing, someone else of writing or singing. We all have our particular gift. Ours is the gift of water, the gift of finding what cannot be seen. We are known as diviners. We are seekers of water, of concealed water.



Techniques of radiesthesia are used by architects and geologists to find running water. These professionals are members of the association of Catalan diviners, who meet every year to share their experiences. There is a spiritual side to these practices that Toni has also found in wine and it is this common feature that led him to use the same terminology.

He has also taken the risk of using the concept “Mediterranean mountain wine”, which has been surprisingly successful in Madrid. “I am a firm believer in Mediterranean varieties because the climate of El Priorat has little in common with that of the Pyrenees or Germany. Grenache is the Pinot noir of the Mediterranean and we have to make sure that people know.” Ever since the Mediterranean diet was included on UNESCO’s World Heritage List, Toni Sànchez realized that emphasising the wine’s Mediterranean connections could be the making of his brand.

## SAURÍ L-2012

Vi de Muntanya mediterrània

Les vinyes velles semblen tenir avantatge en la capacitat de fer vins de gran estructura, concentració i potència. L’extens sistema radicular permet a la Garnatxa i Samsó actuar com un Saurí explorant el sòl, captant aigua i minerals que hi són escassos, transmetent-se a l’hora de tastar aquest vi de muntanya mediterrània, ple de sensacions fruitoses

Vinya Mediterrània Centenària

SAURÍ L-2012

Hundred Year Old Vines

Nowadays, the Mediterranean mountain region reflects not only the history, landscape, flora, fauna and geology, but also the surprising black slate slopes where these weak old vines grow in our vineyard at El Molar planted in 100% Carignan at the beginning of the last century. Consequently, its landscape properly represents the inland Mediterranean world: cultivated terraces on lofty mountains, forests, sacred places testifying the creative genius, social development and the imaginative and spiritual vitality of humanity.

He is convinced that if his projects are successful, it will be because “they tell the story behind every wine. We identify the provenance, the land it is from, and we work on it. I want to define the varieties just as they are, in their maximum expression, with no geographical or administrative limits. The only aim is to express the varietal and climatic variation.”

“What motivates me in each production is the search for the essence of the fruit: all the layers, the display cases or the wood have to be removed. We are increasingly producing single-variety wines because we are seeking sincere expression. You can find out about the oenological process on Google, but you won’t find the hand that works the wine. And it is the hand that gives the personal, distinctive touch.”

He is the sort of winemaker who stamps character on the wine and seeks to justify the production from the very beginning. When asked about mountain or altitude wine, where the sweet Solà d'Ares wine is produced, he quickly responds: "I think it would be more interesting to work with autochthonous varieties such as Trepat or Rojalet for still wines instead of Pinot noir or Riesling." During the second edition of the symposium "Vins d'alçada, cultius de nivell" (Altitude wines, high quality crops), Carme Domingo, from Incavi's Section of Viticulture and Experimental Production, presented the conclusions of a study that identified as many as 14 varieties autochthonous to the Pyrenees.

He is extremely enthusiastic about the Grenache from the Els Bessons farm in Torroja del Priorat, which is where the pictures that illustrate this text were taken. "The breadth of a wine must be taken into account, not just the length. You must know how far you can go." And he reminds me that this can only be achieved with unceasing research and constant questioning. In January 2016, he will be publishing his thesis will the published, the result of four years of research. Several fragments have already seen the light of day. Other studies that focus on soil and climate and which have been published in specialized journals stress this point:

The quality of both its traditional and new wines depends on the unique microclimate and the slate soil. [1]

University and countryside are by no means incompatible: for oenologists they have never been so close.

The Els Bessons farm in Torroja del Priorat is as impressive seen from a distance with Montsant to the north as actually being there. It is easy to feel small surrounded

by woodland and imagining the silhouette that can be seen from the road, from where the farm is reminiscent of the geography of the African continent. It has one special feature: a pine tree with two trunks, which has given the wine produced there its name – The Pineyard. The evenings there are quite magical. In this last personal project of his, he shows that he wants to leave his mark on all the stages in the process, even on the label, which he designed himself. “It is the silhouette of the pine tree with a text from *V for Vendetta* that paraphrases Nietzsche: Nothing is sure and everything is possible.”

Bessons is a black Grenache that grows on slate soils and is then aged in French oak for ten months. It is the latest of his projects to involve him once again with El Priorat after the seven years he spent at Celler Melis, during which



he made many experiences and discoveries: "One of the studies I am most proud of is the one we did with Carignan grapes from Porrera. I spent several years producing wine at Celler Melis but it was only when I wrote my thesis that I understood why Carignan grapes are so prized in some vintages and how such a late variety can mature so well in an area that also harvests late."

In the DOQ Priorat, the wines from the different farms are expressed much more. The wine from Montsant, however, is not so fruity. I don't really understand the designation of origin because a fruity wine does not define a viticultural area. Some wines in the DO Montsant are produced under more austere conditions and they can almost be defined as DOQ Priorat. I think that the vineyards should be classified better and I don't really agree with so much zoning.

With interests in both the DOQ Priorat and the DO Montsant, but with wines that are not included in the designation of origin, Toni has no hesitation in discussing



the issues that concern him. But he does so with the clear objective of progress.

His course at the URV soon revealed to him the magic of El Priorat but he has never lost sight of the Pyrenees, where he has his roots. "In the Catalan Pyrenees some vines were planted ten years ago: Muscat, Pinot gris, Grenache blanc and Pedro Ximenez. We dry the grapes on straw and then press them so that we get the desired sweetness. It is a special product that grows on gravel, basalt and marl soils." His next challenge is a pomace wine containing 10% of mature rachis – ellagic tannins – but in this case it will be produced in El Priorat.

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And near Organyà, the land that saw him grow and do his calculations in the air, there are the olive trees, probably the crop that he was first responsible for. "My family used to go and harvest olives. There were three oil mills in Organyà. At that time in the Pyrenees the economy was subsistence based. We still have the olive grove in the Pic d'Ares, on a farm called Els Vinyets (The Vines), which is a coincidence." The grove produces Arbequina olives and was bought by his maternal grandfather. Toni has brought it back to life to produce ecological extra virgin olive oil at an altitude of more than a thousand metres. It is yet another exciting challenge: extracting the oil from 100-year-old trees that are the ultimate expression of the terroir and the symbol of the mountains of the Serra de Prada, which protects the valley from the harshness of the extreme climate. "Not many oils are produced at such a high altitude as ours. It is at the limit of 1,100 metres at which olives can be grown. The thermal inversion prevents them from freezing."

“I value the crop. It will not make me rich, but a natural mountain crop will survive. At home we used to do traditional fermentations, and it is this cultural practice that reminds me that for things to have their own personality, you have to get to the bottom of them. And this is especially true of the wildest zones.”

**The Pyrenees and El Priorat:**

**harsh and difficult regions that have provided  
him with a wide range of life experiences**

“I have got a lot out of it. I like the job I do and earning my living in this way. I am aware that could earn double what I do if I had continued with chemistry but I would not be as happy as I am here. In this environment, gazing at the vines, I feel privileged. I don't need anything else.”

Just as he did when he was studying in the Pyrenees with no parental guidance, now that he is working with vines he still follows his intuition. “I want the plant to be in balance with itself. Since it is bio, plus eco, plus organic, you don't have to work so hard in the cellar. If you provide nutrients, if you give the vine what it needs, you don't have to add it later during the production process. The balanced plant transpires more and has more defences by the end of the year.” And this balance is transferred to the human body. It establishes links; we are both living beings.

Courage, risk and just the right amount of ambition have prompted him to produce the first Catalan beer-wine hybrid, the result of the interaction of five elements: Priorat, Grenache, craft beer, passion and slate. An exciting new product that goes by the name of Sol del Priorat-

Collita 2014. The must from Grenache vines growing in slate soil gives sugars and aromas, and adds complexity to the beer, which is aged in Allier French oak barrels. It is an innovative way of presenting wine – or beer, depending on how you look at it. The project will not stop here because Toni has a partner to take it to the international level by combining beer with the noble autochthonous varieties of the leading wine regions.

He admires the people of the United States for their entrepreneurial spirit and the French for their skill at working with ageing barrels, particularly at the Seguin-Moreau cooperage. He does not specialize only in oenology. He has extended his learning to include the professions that are part of the winemaking process, such as barrel making. Seguin and Moreau are companies that were founded in 1870 and 1838 in the region of Cognac in France, and which work in the *savoir-faire* of top quality traditional crafts. He skillfully picks up the tools and demonstrates how to repair the oak to prevent wine from being lost through impurities. He is in the Celler Melis, which he has rented to make wine.

\* \* \*

2013 is a year of change. 2014 is the year of consolidation. 2015 begins with a new team but with the same enthusiasm. As if it were a jigsaw puzzle, every piece has found its perfect fit. “If I don’t run risks, I can’t work. That’s what I learned in the USA with ‘No risk, No Fun’. And that’s why I set up my own winemaking business and am involved in others, which give me different perspectives and knowledge to share.”

“I think that it is important to take part in all the projects that you have a stake in. The wines are my creation so it is important to be part of every initiative.” This is the

formula he strives for but which he cannot attain in every case. Whatever role he agrees to play, however, he always feels free and comfortable. In El Priorat he has two points of reference and two loves: Carignan and Grenache. "It is interesting to see the versatility of Grenache in different places. A single variety can be expressed in many different ways in just a few metres and El Priorat is the perfect place to see it. With the lecturer Montse Nadal we have just finished a study analyzing the ripening process of this variety in early and late areas such as Gratallops and Bellmunt, on the one hand, and Porrera and La Morera on the other."

The results of the present study indicate that the vineyards in early-ripening areas and with more stoney soils are more vulnerable to severe climate and drought. At the end of the ripening process, the grapes display a considerable increase in sugars which does not match the corresponding concentration of anthocyanins in the grape. Advancing the date of harvest may partly mitigate this imbalance between the ripeness of the pulp and the skin. (*Revista Enoviticultura*, 31)

Toni Sànchez has a professional profile that is increasingly common but it has by no means been common up to now in the world of oenology, at least in Catalonia. After being heavily involved in olive growing for more than ten years, the experience of the symbiosis between soil, climate and man now acquires greater force than ever before. "The main aim is to provide the tools that connect the consumer to each individual project, generally involving the land and the climate that enables the vines



and the olive trees to develop with a personality all of their own." Flying winemaker, oenologist and olive grower, Toni Sánchez realizes that he has a debt with the past. "When I was a small boy I saw my family's land being cultivated and things being grown. And I felt that I could follow in the family tradition and work as part of a team but always as a freelancer. I have a philosophy and a way of working all of my own. I want to make wines and oils that are suitable for all needs. I have multidisciplinary ideas with one common denominator."

As well as undertaking personal projects, Toni Sánchez works as a consultant oenologist in various regions where he expresses his vision of viticulture and oenology in consonance with the personal and commercial interests of

his clients. “My profession is referred to in many ways, all of which I think are fine, but I use the terms oenologist and olive grower. I’m not very keen on the term consultant but it’s certainly the term that is most used abroad. In Catalonia, however, it’s not understood in the same way because it sounds like you are looking down on everyone else.”

**Vinyes del Terror/ DO Tarragona.** Just two kilometres from the Mediterranean Sea lies the property belonging to the Morell family: a seven-hectare vineyard with limestone soils. It produces varietal wines of Cabernet Sauvignon – with and without black Grenache – and Sauvignon Blanc. Ten years of consultancy have provided splendid results. Contrast between vine and man, tradition and modernity, risk and ecological agriculture.

**Melis/ DOQ Priorat.** Slate soils, reserve wine, blends with Grenache, Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Carignan. Porrera. Seven years of consultancy. At present, the Celler de Melis is rented so that El Solà d’Ares can make its wines.

There is still time to practise in other regions and get involved in projects by individual winelovers or professionals who are seeking to share their talent. The references below are just two examples of places that are quite distant from each other but which share the quest for varietal expression:

**La Vinya del Quintet.** A Merlot 100% called Monestir, in Santes Creus (Alt Camp). It is a young project – it has only been underway for a year – and the results have been surprising but expected. The owners are doctors from Switzerland and Houston. They are very proud of the results, although they had to be convinced of the viability of the project.

**Escarpa Viticultores.** Syrah 100% in Salamanca. “We have just bottled the first vintage. The grapes are from warm and cold areas.”

He has other ongoing projects with friends and sommeliers who seek his advice. The bottom line is that he is committed to spreading the word and making people understand all facets of wine production. His blog is a good example of this:

*Terroir.* French term to describe a particular geographical area that has specific geological, climatic and environmental features differentiating it from others. The term *terroir* is a loan word used very frequently when speaking of agriculture, and particularly wine, and is often applied to refer to individual plots (since the quality of wine depends heavily on local conditions). Several *terroirs* can be distinguished within a single designation of origin depending on their soil characteristics, hours of sun, precipitation, wind, altitude, etc. And the local vinification and viticultural techniques.

“My plan for the future is to make a living from viticulture, from my projects, and those of other people who I advise, and which involve learning and making some sort of new contribution.” He asks for nothing more and firmly believes that he would have been “impoverished with only one wine project.” El Solà d’Ares produces 3,000 bottles of Saurí Mediterranean Mountain Wine, 400 of Saurí Vinyes Velles, 1,200 of Bessons and 500 of Dolç Assolellat. They are mainly sold in Tarragona and the rest of Catalonia, but also in Madrid, Austria, Denmark and Germany. “Many clients are private individuals, friends and acquaintances from the sector. Anna Molins, who I went to the Oktoberfest with and who still lives in Germany, buys Saurí and takes it to

the Bayer plant in Ludwigshafen where I have friends. In fact, I owe them a visit. Producing microwines is more complicated than making large volumes." This meticulous work is just what he likes doing.

\* \* \*

He combines making wine with teaching at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili and carrying out research. This year, 2015, he has taught students in the second year of the Professional Sommelier course the subjects on beers and wines of the world. He has taught them the wine geography of the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil and Germany. They were all satisfied and surprised:

Very clear explanations. A good teacher, receptive and wise. (Pili Sanmartín, 2nd-year student on the Professional Sommelier course at the URV)

"When we finished the last class, the students applauded and told me that nobody had explained international wine geography to them as I had." To make understanding easier, he has a very personal way of teaching the subject. He focuses on countries and latitudes, and shows students that Melbourne is comparable to Bordeaux and Napa to Morocco. He folds a paper map of the world to explain that the latitudes in the northern and southern hemispheres (30.50) overlap. "The best way to learn is to compare, always. Comparing a Jumilla Syrah with a Côte du Rhone reveals that they can seem to be two totally different varieties." Plants do not understand climates and express themselves differently accordingly. That is why there is such a wide variety of Cabernet Sauvignon.





“I think that I will always have knowledge to transmit because you are always learning and communicating at the same time. And you can do it with every new generation because you are always discovering new things.”

Oenology helps him to understand the external world, teaching puts this understanding into practice and research enables him “to understand the internal world of the plant.” He is a member of the URV’s Research Group in Viticulture of the Department of Biochemistry and Biotechnology of

the Faculty of Oenology. He works alongside the oenologist Montse Nadal, who is the leader of the group. They have worked together on technological innovations during the last 100 years, with conclusions such as the following:

The great innovations, then, came at the end of the 1990s when wine filtration was perfected (reverse osmosis, cationic exchange resins). In the new millennium, with globalization, the wine sector is facing new challenges. Wine consumers are changing and competitiveness between current markets is increasing, which drives diversification and quality management through integral and sustainable production. [2]

On El Priorat, a region they have both observed and worked in, he says the following:

The old vines that still survive are our heritage and should be preserved if at all possible. Therefore, the economic prosperity and stability of the Priorat vine should not come at the expense of the environment. A taste for good wine has brought with it a greater social sensitivity for environmental protection. In particular, the Priorat landscape has natural, aesthetic, social and economic values that need to be preserved. One of the main techniques that has been used in El Priorat to increase the productivity of its vineyards is the introduction of terraces so that the process of tending the vines could be mechanized. In this way, the landscape and its appearance was not transformed arbitrarily


but was made more environmentally sustainable. In some areas, the activity of winegrowing, which had been in peril, was ensured. [1]

He has worked on climate change, one of the three great challenges for the wine world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, together with communication and the incorporation of new consumers.

Given the considerable variability between vineyards in the old Mazuela vines in the Priorat Protected Designation of Origin, predicting a range of concentrations of anthocyanins and tannins is of fundamental importance if qualities and styles of wine are to be defined.

He has also carried out research into the vigour of the vine in Mediterranean climates, the influence of the degree of ripeness on the phenolic composition of the wine produced using thermovinification, the characterization of Grenache Blanc in the DO Terra Alta, the definition of typical features of the Grenache Blanc variety as a function of the factors of terroir and the style of wine in an attempt to improve its competitiveness on the global market. He will go on to apply this research to the vine.





**“Cause it’s a winding road  
I’ve been walking for a long time  
And I still don’t know  
Where it goes”**

**WINE AND CULTURE**

<https://youtu.be/dTn31jn1JZ4>



Toni Sànchez has listened to the song *Winding Road* by the North-American singer Bonnie Sommerville thousands of times. It reminds him of California and the wine trails but also of his own personal experiences. "I've been walking (along this road) for a long time and I still don't know where it goes," say the lyrics. It expresses the natural doubts of whether you have chosen the right path, of knowing what will be the next stop. "There is a whole world waiting to be discovered beyond our borders," he says. And that is the reason why he flies to the other side of the world when there is relatively little work to be done in the vineyards in Catalonia.

In Australia and New Zealand friends, acquaintances and wine professionals who share the same philosophy and sincere friendship are waiting for him with open arms. And they have been every year for the last three years. During his three-month stay in the Antipodes, he is showered with the same attention that he gives them when they come to El Priorat.

Payton & Jones is his first stop in Australia. Then Yarra Valley in Victoria and finally Sacred Hill, Hawke's Bay, in New Zealand. In the New World, technology is king, and Syrah, Pinot Noir and Sauvignon Blanc are all popular varieties, so he feels quite at home. His enthusiasm is transmitted on the social networks where he can be seen picking grapes and sharing moments in which wine is never in short supply. "Oenogastronomic holidays, always." He has made new discoveries like the "Kiwi Fruit Winery" – a winery that makes wine from kiwis – and been photographed with a koala. His passion for everything rural is aroused far away from his native Organyà. "I like exploring new areas and meeting importers. That's why

I go to Melbourne, and then I work as an assistant wine maker in a New Zealand winery in the middle of a volcanic area, pumping over red wines. I am interested in seeing how the red varieties develop in a hot climate, even though they are more into whites.”

He shares what he learns on his blog. For example, this comparison of how Sauvignon Blanc adapts to cool and warm climates:

You can learn a lot about wines when you travel around the world. Throughout history, vines have been transported from one place to another in the hemisphere, for cultural reasons or because of a variety’s physiological behavior or better resistance to particular climatic conditions. The resulting wines have expressed the taste and the aroma characteristic of each of these places. This is the case of Sauvignon Blanc in New Zealand, and particularly the better known Marlborough Sauvignon, in the north of the South Island. The experience I have had in unfamiliar lands has revealed to me the extent to which climate can affect a variety. [3]

Despite the hard work, it’s also a time when he manages to get away from it all. These days are his holidays. The only other time of the year he takes a break is ten days in July, in the middle of the pre-harvest stress in Catalonia. Just before veraison in El Priorat and Tarragona vines. He knows that June is a very intense month too, and he spends almost every day green pruning in the vineyards. And then, during the harvest, he is constantly on the move between El Terrer and El Solà d’Ares, and the new projects

that he has taken on over the last two years. Varieties with different rhythms of ripening have to queue up before being allowed into the winery. The harvest is long and does not finish until October with the Grenache from Els Bessons in Torroja del Priorat, and the Dolç Asolellat even later in the Pyrenees. But then come the olives. And he is still thinking about a pomace wine.

“The trips to Australia and New Zealand are long but I enjoy them. They are a break for knowledge and inspiration, particularly because you can see things from a distance. That is why we are flying winemakers. We need to get away to understand the enigma of wine and of the people around us.”

“There are some things – like my taste notes – that I take with me.” The disconnection, then, is not complete because his writing keeps him thinking of Catalonia. “Until 15 April I’m the happiest man alive, but from then on I start to give orders and I still haven’t got used to the fact that, with the difference in time, they are not received and acted on until the next day.” As the saying goes “Out of sight, out of mind” but not for long. “I come back feeling like new and for the time being I’m pretty sure I’ll be going back every year.”

When he gets back from his trip, the first thing he does when he leaves Barcelona airport is to make his way to the vineyard in El Molar – the one where we arranged to meet, the one with the old Carignan vines – because “it’s the first to warn of any problems. In less than a week, I’m there.”

With all his oenological activity and his trips abroad you would think that his agenda would be chockablock and that he’d have no time for anything else. But he has. Between one thing and another he has a few spare





moments for other projects and interests that are inevitably connected to wine.

“On three Saturdays, I gave a course in English to some Germans. I structured it to focus on two areas: varietal wines and ripening. I try to teach as much as possible and we have a good time. We did intensive sessions in the morning and the afternoon, including lunch when we tried to find courses to match the taste references.” He is convinced that the key component in training is to taste the aromas and acquire memories and experience to refer to during tasting. He also finds it useful to establish references with real experiences because otherwise it is difficult to relate to the subject.

“When I present my wines I try to bring the leaves of the varieties we are comparing. In this way I can make the vine familiar to those who may never have been in a vineyard.

I try to talk about those things that made me sit up and take notice. To explain tannicity, for example, I remind them what the pip in the grapes we eat on New Year's Eve tastes like: rustic and bitter. That's why a lot of people don't swallow it and they understand that the pip plays a role in bitterness. We try to find practical cases from everyday life to explain wine and understand it."


He regards non-curricular courses as being "freer and more suited to individual needs." However, being a lecturer on the URV course for sommeliers – of which he is very proud – is more complicated because he has to follow a syllabus. Somehow our conversation turns to *llicorella*, the slate soil characteristic of El Priorat which gives the wines minerality in the mouth. He speaks of black and blue soils, and rusty and orangey ones, like the roof tiles of his native Pyrenees. And also of how wines are better expressed, are more aromatic and have better taste when the plant suffers most. "We should know how to interpret the plant, get inside it, to really understand and know what it is saying to us."

He has also been responsible for a series of wine blending seminars with the Vinyes del Terrer winery, which he advises. They are classes for all sorts of people who wish to acquire a greater knowledge of wine. The first edition focused on how the shape and the volume of the glass affect the organoleptic profile of wine. There are theory and practical sessions, and only a limited number of places. It is a private initiative which provides attendees with an overall knowledge of vines, wine making, wine tasting and viticulture using the method of knowledge-based learning.

And there is also wine tourism. He does not understand why El Priorat does not have more resources to encourage

foreign tourism from Scandinavia, Switzerland, the USA and Australia. He is quite prepared to spend a day showing tourists the region; he regards it as an investment. "I think that oenologists are now also trained in wine tourism. I do it in El Priorat. Because there are not many people who have a good command of languages, I am often asked to take charge of groups of visitors." Toni's guided tours are a trip through the history of the region and they go from Torroja to Scala Dei along the old road so that they can see the very heart of the wine region. "We taste the grapes and the must and I always give them a bottle to take home." They are usually foreign tourists and he is proud to show them the landscape of the Mediterranean mountain that is a candidate to become a World Heritage Site. His bond to the region that has adopted him and his understanding of it have prompted him to take part in Ethos Priorat – Terroir Talking, founded by Elisabeth Hecker, a resident in Torroja del Priorat. It is a forum that is dedicated to nature and in which each professional provides expertise on a particular area. Ethos Priorat has an indestructible bond with wine and there is even a project to publish a book. "The author wants to describe the spirit of the region to others. It's all voluntary work so that people abroad can get to know El Priorat. I provide expertise on chemistry."

Some tasks are more exciting than labelling wine, or doing paperwork and analyses. "I do a lot of vat tasting and I trust my palate. Some tests have to be done for legal reasons but many others can be done by trusting your sensory impressions." He is a rebel but quite sure of himself.



You have to take risks and do different things in the world of wine. You are regarded as a stranger, but you do what you feel

Finally he has just enough time to reflect on his chosen profession. He is convinced that it is important “not to stagnate, to respond to diversity and to surprise.” “I am 37 years old and when I look back I feel that I have seen a lot. But in wine, ten years is nothing.” He knows that you need tools and patience to work with vines, even more so if you’re working alone: “When you make wine by yourself, there are more stones on the path.”

He is not afraid of working without the help of a partner and he knows that ultimately the wine must be good if it is to be shared. “It’s the wine that brings people to you, so you have to spend all the time you have on it.” He invests a lot of time in his wine and he has imprinted on it his style of elegance and sensitivity. “Some people have told me that they think it is produced by a woman.”

The wine describes his character. But when I ask him for a reference that would surprise him, he chooses a distillate. “If I had to make an impression on myself, I would not go for a wine. I would choose a product with a powerful soul like a Sauvignon Blanc distillate.”

An unexpected end? Perhaps not. Because when I ask him about the connection with wine, he says that it is total. “Ultimately, it’s the polyphenols again. They are the link. To extract them at their optimal point of maturity, you have to do just what you do with wine and do it at low temperatures.”



Sometimes oenologists are difficult to understand. “In the bottle I always see the three-year investment which not everybody knows is there. In fact, most people are probably not aware of it but if you want to start out in the wine world, you can’t get round it. The waiting time and the source of it all: the vineyard where the wine comes from. I think we should communicate this better and this is precisely what we are trying to do at El Solà d’Ares.” He smiles and continues: “You never get your initial investment back. At best, you find financial stability. But I’ve decided I’m going to retire three years before time.”

He admires France, where he trained and discovered the immensity of wine, and also the philosophy of such regions as Bordeaux and Burgundy. “They value what is in the bottle. Our society still appreciates the outside too much, aesthetics.”

"I really like wine and I drink a lot of it, because polyphenols are good for your health, aren't they?" But there are also other drinks that relax him, excite him and connect him to the land. He tells me that his house is full of aromatic plants that he tends and uses to make infusions of sage, thyme, rosemary, mint-chocolate and pennyroyal. In summer he picks the elderberry flowers that grow in the Pyrenees. He has done a master's degree in nutrition and metabolism, which means that he is up to date with how food can benefit the body and the soul. In other words, he knows all about equilibrium.

\* \* \*

Being a member of a group of young, well-trained oenologists is not always a guarantee of success. However, his career so far shows what can be done with tenacity and perseverance. He is critical of his generation: "The crisis has meant that people have stopped taking risks and most professionals working as oenologists do exactly the same as previous generations. But there has to be evolution. We have to take that extra step. We have to take risks. I think we did this with the Grenache beer and I'm sure there will be other projects in which we can combine different worlds, understand them and enjoy them."

The solitude of the double-trunked pine at the Bessons vineyard has become a part of him. He has decided to live alongside a reality that is not as enthusiastic as he is. "I've not been aware of any creativity in Catalonia for some time now. I think the sector has stagnated. It's surviving but there are not many of us who take that extra step. That's why we just get by." He has plenty of friends and professionals to remind him that he has taken some risky decisions (such as leaving the DO Montsant and adopting

the designation of origin “Mediterranean mountain wine). But the change has been for the good and he is not greatly concerned. He shows me an article on internet written by the wine critic José Peñín, who says the following: “The freedom there is today in wines should be interpreted in the most positive sense. In other times, certain practices were looked down on because they were the excuse to make common wines from remnants and cheap sources.” “It could not be clearer,” says Toni, aware that the critic understands the need to produce table wines.

“In Madrid, they told us that they would sell it with the products from Còsmic – an exceptional project of biodynamic wines led by the oenologist from L’Empordà Eduard Batlle.” It is regarded as a rarity produced by extreme intelligence and total communion with the land. People like it because it is good.

I reproduce here part of his last email before leaving for Australia in which he tells of the new articles published in specialized journals: “Many thanks to all those of you who have patiently (and sometimes stressfully) put up with me so that this research project can start bearing fruit.”

I’ve been searching  
for a long time  
Still have hope  
I’m gonna find  
my way home







# PERSONAL JOURNIES

“Porto is one of the wine regions that most fascinates me. It reminds me of El Priorat. It’s the Portuguese Priorat: among other things because of the river, the vines stepped like an amphitheatre that peter out at the bottom of the slope, the inland area with slate soils and the type of pruning. The two regions are similar.” It is the oldest designation of origin in the Iberian Peninsula, it has the Touriga Nacional grape, it reminds him of the *vi ranci* (mellow wine) produced in Catalonia and it is one of the three corners of the triangle that has most seduced him in the wine world. “It represents rusticity. Like the Rheingau region in Germany – which he knows because of the Georg Breuer Winery – it is full of charm, and it has terraced vineyards facing the sun and stone-walled drives leading up to the individual properties, a witness to rural life. The stone walls always remind me of these three areas: Porto, Priorat and Rheingau.” He is most attracted to areas in which vines find it difficult to grow. He shares the thesis that I have heard the oenologist René Barbier express on more than one occasion: “Oenologists have to show their mettle in the difficult years.”

Outside this rugged triangle, he also allows himself to be seduced by gentler terrains with equally bucolic landscapes:

**Banyuls (Languedoc-Roussillon).** “In terms of wine, time has stood still. The conception is old and enchanting.”

**Chablis (Burgundy).** “It represents tranquility, peace, in combination with the ochre and golden colours of the grapes.”

**La Drome (France).** “Lose yourself among the olive trees that smell like lavender. It’s a marvel.”

## Gastronomic route

He often goes to the Restaurant Almosta in the city of Tarragona and the Antull in Reus. The first was where he made his first delivery of Saurí wine. And he still delivers the wine to the newly-named business led by Berna Rios, a great defender and champion of slow food. The same thing happened with the Restaurant Antull in Reus, the place where he first presented Saurí with a mythical tasting in which the wine was part of a strawberry cocktail served at night. "We started serving the wine at night, with music. The youngsters had a great time and it was a real success. More people should take more risks like this." For the last three years he has been part of the Tarragona Slow Food movement and he feels quite at home with the philosophy of good, healthy, fair food that it espouses. "I value good food. I come from the Pyrenees where the meat is very good, but the sea also provides some real gastronomic delicacies. I like finding places where the product is good quality, and when I do, I know that there will be a sensitivity for wine as well." In El Priorat he makes special mention of the Celler de l'Àspic and he praises those restaurants that "have wine lists with updated vintages and serve their wine at just the right temperature." In the Pyrenees and Andorra, on the other hand, he loves the gastronomy but says that the wine lists are "really awful", largely because distribution is not good. "When the wine list is long and varied, I select the food to go with the wine. My choice also depends on where I am. The other day I was in El Penedès and I couldn't resist tasting a *xarel·lo* varietal wine. And in a few days' time I am going to a *calçotada* (traditional Catalan meal of barbecued spring onions). I'll take the Monestir wine we make in Santes Creus, a Merlot 100%." It costs €20 a bottle. He is not one of those who think that for a *calçotada* you need a cheap wine. "I try to teach people wherever I go, always."

### Barcelona

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**WHAT PEOPLE THINK**

**Fermí Fernández**, actor

They were first put in touch with each other because Fermí had been given a part in the play *The Sommelier*.

“Meeting an oenologist (a real one) is something else. They are a storehouse of smells, tastes and textures. They can dissect a wine in a matter of seconds, while all the rest of us mortals – however much we love wine – are left gaping and wondering how they have managed to find so much poetry where we can only see a liquid of some indefinite colour. And the only things we can say about it is whether we like it or not (and what we say does not always coincide with the opinion of the tasting professional). Toni Sànchez is also quite a paradoxical case. Children born in the Penedès or El Priorat are assumed to be able to express the tastes and aromas of a wine because of where they live, because they have grown up surrounded by vines. But it is more difficult to believe that someone who was born and grew up in the mountains surrounded by cows can have developed such a gift. So it seems to me that Toni is doubly deserving of praise: he has been able to unravel the organoleptic secrets of nature even though nature has not given him any help at all.”



**Rosa Maria Canela Balsebre**, anthropologist

The world of divining has revealed the connection between wine and pseudo-science

“The history of Saurí wine brings together an enquiring, curious, intuitive oenologist, some old Montsant vines and a diviner from El Molar. The wine was the subject of considerable debate at the second annual meeting of diviners from the Catalan-speaking territories held in Matarranya in 2013 (). During this meeting, Toni discovered a world full of surprises and magic. Through his wine, the participants were able to confirm the strong bond that Saurí wine has with a millennial tradition: the discovery of treasures. The oenologist has an excellent wine and the diviner finds the water that can change the destiny of a plot of land, of a village.”

**Natàlia Sanahuges**, artist

They share an artistic and unconventional outlook on life and wine

“He is himself, a solitary tree that extends its branches so that they reach everywhere and everyone, generous, and a good friend. He is in love with life, and he shows this love in the things that he does, in how he talks about them and in his enthusiasm. He is like a small boy who still preserves some of his innocence and this makes him special, like his wines.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those people who I have asked questions and who have had the time and the inclination to give me a reply. I would also like to thank all those with whom I have studied, entered into conversation and exchanged messages about the world of wine: I have undoubtedly learned from you and I will continue to do so. And finally, a big thank you to the two people who gave me life and the person with whom I am lucky enough to share it every day.

Ruth Troyano Puig

[1] Montse Nadal and Antoni Sánchez-Ortiz, "Territorios de vino: el Priorat", *Territoires du vin*, 3, Université de Bourgogne: 2011 <<http://revuesshs.u-bourgogne.fr/territoiresduvin/document.php?id=942>>.

[2] Montse Nadal and Antoni Sánchez-Ortiz, "Innovacions enològiques els darrers cent anys", *Dossiers agraris*, 16, Institució Catalana d'Estudis Agraris: 2013 <<http://www.raco.cat/index.php/DossiersAgraris/article/viewFile/286452/374576> >

[3] "Sauvignon Blanc: clima càlid o clima fresc?", *El Solà d'Ares*, October 24, 2013, <<https://soladares.wordpress.com/2013/10/24/sauvignon-blanc-clima-calid-o-clima-fresc/>>

Publicacions URV

1st edition: March 2016

Legal deposit: T 504-2016

ISBN: 978-84-8424-440-0

PUBLICACIONS DE LA UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

Av. Catalunya, 35 - 43002 Tarragona

Tel. 977 558 474

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DO Tarragona / DOQ Priorat / Table wine

**TONI SÀNCHEZ-ORTIZ**

**Natàlia Sanahuges** [artist]:



He is like a small boy who still preserves some of his innocence and this makes him special, like his wines



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