

Wine Portraits

Francesc Ferré

DO Terra Alta

Francesc Ferré

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Let us not become insensitive but fight to conserve our history, so that in the future we can be proud of the people of Corbera who one day shook hands and tried to save what their grandfathers' grandfathers left them.

Joaquim Clua Julià

*No perdem la sensibilitat i lluitem per conservar la nostra història,
perquè en un futur ens puguem sentir orgullosos dels corberans
que un dia es van donar les mans i van intentar salvar
el que els avis dels seus avis els hi van deixar*

Joaquim Clua Julià

"WE SHOULD WALK THROUGH CORBERA OLD TOWN in our bare feet. It's a shrine!" The streets are deserted and the houses lie in ruins in the bright end-of-February sun. The blue sky is webbed with clouds, scattered by the cold, north-westerly wind. We are witnesses to one of the most Dantesque scenes of the Spanish Civil War in the Terra Alta region, which has been living in isolation for a long time now. "We are the fifth province," sighs Francesc Ferré, the young oenologist at Celler Frisach. Art, in the form of the Alphabet of Freedom, also makes its presence felt in the Old Town. It begins with a huge iron A at the entrance to the village, although the letter Ç (from the Catalan word *falç* [sickle]) has most significance for him. "Letters make up words, and words give rise to fraternity." These letters were created by 25 artists committed to constructing a unique and universal monument to peace.

"Villages are short of people, not resources." Categorical in what he says, Francesc feels that he has a duty to the region where he was born and he always extols his family's country tradition and the bloody episodes that the people of Corbera had to live through in the 20th century. "All the families in the Old Town used to make their own wine, just as they used to make bread. Among the ruins there are tiled presses and various traditional utensils. Nowadays, the average man needs to consume 3,500 kilocalories but years ago he needed 7,000. He would eat a hunk of bread, a few figs, a couple of almonds and hazelnuts, and a large glass of wine so that he

would have enough strength to work the land," he says. "It wasn't until two years after the Battle of the Ebro that anyone could go back to making wine. The vines in Corbera had been completely destroyed. The villagers survived by collecting the shrapnel."

He did his primary and secondary education in various schools in Terra Alta (Ascó, Corbera d'Ebre and Gandesa) and he specialised in oenology first at the Jaume Ciurana School in Falset and then at the Faculty of Oenology of the URV. "In Falset I learned how and in Tarragona why." His business card proudly proclaims that he is a 'farmer' alongside the stamp "I am autochthonous", which is also to be found printed on the cardboard boxes in which the wine is delivered. His faith in his origins remains intact and it is as solid as his respect for the land. At Cota 42 in Corbera d'Ebre, a vantage point that commands a 360° view of the surrounding Terra Alta countryside, he praises trench wines and it is no exaggeration to say that all the visitors are moved by his words before he starts the tasting: "I have to show you something that is quite spectacular. What you can see here is priceless."

"The land does not go out of fashion and our wines are closely connected to it. The connection may be classic but it's real. There are olives, almond trees and vines. Peaches, too. That's what we are, nothing more and nothing less," he says with conviction. He likes working the vines – he says that he can't get on with the laboratory – but he is of a restless

disposition, and between the countryside and the winery he finds room for creativity. “He’s always springing new ideas on us at mealtimes for labels. We all discuss them and take a group decision, but his opinion is often the one that prevails,” confesses Antònia Llop, his mother.

She is a schoolteacher and his father, whose name is also Francesc, is a farmer and driving instructor because, as he says, the land “doesn’t give enough to live on.” Since he was a young boy, Francesc junior has combined studying with working the land and he has always been taught the importance of being competent at producing wine and doing business. “His father used to tell him that he had to understand why it was necessary to fertilize,” his mother pointed out. In 2005, with the support of his parents, Francesc and his brother Joan – who is now studying the degree in Agricultural Engineering in Lleida – decided to start producing their own wine. Until then they had always taken their grapes to the local cooperative, of which their grandfather had been one of the founders.

“The winery is a place that produces sustenance .” It is another shrine full of silence, magic and warmth, with old wine presses and newer steel vats. Sang de Corb, Karme, Vernatxa, L’Abrunet, La Foradada are all real and imaginary names redolent of Terra Alta that acquire added value when paired with a wine. The Catalan spoken in the Terra Alta, his

language, gives such authenticity and character to the project that it has ended up in Michelin-star restaurants as far afield as San Francisco.

Francesc has always accepted the desolation of the Old Town just as it is. The historical memory still needs to be revived and his generation, the grandchildren of the generation that suffered the war, want to rise to the challenge. In wine, he has found a way of not forgetting and of paying tribute. He is as obstinate as he is rebellious and it is no accident that the imposing old church of Corbera, still scarred by the conflict, is the stage for a historic night for Terra Alta wine. Sipping their *vernatxa*, eclipsed by the autochthonous grape, men and women from all around gather to give support to the leading oenologists of the Terra Alta who have understood the words of the poet Joana Raspall that accompany the letter J in the Alphabet of Freedom in the Old Town: "On Earth there should never be a place for hate and war."

"Ours is an organic winery. We are farmers, we cultivate autochthonous varieties. If we don't value what we have, who will?"



“Villages are short of people,
not resources”





The Frisach Winery, which bears the name of his father's family, is to be found at number 26, Avinguda Catalunya in Corbera d'Ebre. "Like all the names ending in *ch* – Domènech, March, Llambrich – ours is from central Europe, from Austria." And he adds, "It's a strange name. There can't be more than a hundred in the whole of Spain and they all have some connection to Corbera." The winery is on the ground floor of a house that was used for the same purpose in 1930 and which was purchased by Francesc Ferré's parents 15 years ago because, according to his mother, it was "part of a job lot with some land we wanted to buy." As soon as you go in, you cannot help but notice the old, dark-red presses that are still being used, a testimony to the production of wine at the beginning of the 20th century.

"If you are no good at schoolwork, you can always be a farmer." This is something that Francesc has heard more than once in the village. He deeply regrets the tone used to refer to a profession that has been so valuable for the country, for the conservation of the landscape, the prevention of fires and the production of crops. And it is vital for food. "In the United States, farmers are highly qualified but here the people who understand the profession are all old and they are dying," he says. "The risk is enormous. You work hard all year and but your crops may be ruined by a hail storm at the end of the season. We've been farmers all our lives, more than 200 years devoted to tending the land. So we know that wine is not just wine. It is much more. There is a lot of added value: it is imagination, creativity and there is a very high intangible percentage," he says. He seems quite comfortable in his multi-tasking role in a small family business.

His family background and his parents' conviction soon made him see that he would have to be formally trained if he wanted to work the land. "If you don't have what it takes, don't go out into the fields," they used to tell him at home. "If you have to use the fertilizing machine, it's not enough just to know how it works. It's more important to know why you're using it," his father advised.

Unlike many others of his generation, he has never broken his links with country life. He did up to his fourth year of primary education in Ascó, in La Ribera d'Ebre, and completed it in Corbera. He went to secondary school in the capital of Terra Alta, Gandesa, a peaceful and likeable place that is close to the country and where he learned as much as at school and at home. "When we were children, we used to build huts among the vines. After playing for hours and hours, we would knock them down," he reminisces innocently.

From an early age it was clear to him that “villages are short of people not resources” and this is probably why he has constantly tried to better himself and acquire know-how that will be used in Corbera d’Ebre. “You’re selling wine, not making empty promises. You’re selling your family’s history. It is very important to pass it down the ages and not everyone knows how to do that.”

His adolescent years were by no means free of rebellion. You can tell because he is clear and direct, and puts up with no nonsense. His mother, who is busy in the winery putting new labels on bottles of L’Abrunet, says she is glad her son has been able to channel his character into a fulfilling profession. “His grandfather on his father’s side had cooperativism in his blood and he took all the agreements made in assemblies very seriously. But when Francesc finished studying we realised that the viable thing to do was to set up a family business.”

“He wanted to work at home because he realised there was a lot of work. When he was studying for his degree in Tarragona all he thought all he thought about was getting back to Corbera at the weekend to lend a hand.” His first concern was to respond to his family’s needs but he had to give priority to his studies so that they would be better able to cope with country life. At the Jaume Ciurana School of Oenology in Falset he learned how to do things and at the URV’s Faculty of Oenology he learned why. And in his village he learned a lot more about the values of humanity, respect, public spiritedness and harmony. This is the point at which the painter Jesús Pedrola first comes up in the conversation. He is the only artist living in the Old Town and the driving force behind its new-found vitality. He was responsible for the children’s mural of handprints in clay

and coloured circles. He worked out of Corbera's House of Culture to produce the piece and it now welcomes visitors to the Old Town, encouraging everyone to pay tribute to the inhabitants of Corbera. A period of 17 years separates the hand of Francesc the oenologist from the hand of the cheeky youngster he used to be imprinted on a green background, which surely suggested that he would have a promising future in the area. The passage of time has provided him with expertise, self-assuredness and confidence in the people of Corbera and La Foradada (the Hill Full of Holes). Ten years after making his first wine in the Frisach Winery, in 2015 he pays tribute to the village where he was born in the image of tall buildings peppered with small windows. "Terra Alta is a diamond that is 300 metres underground. It's still going to take some time before it is cut and polished like the Priorat," he sighs.





I have learned that there is no need for secrets, that information and knowledge should be shared: you can follow the advice of others but your grapes belong to you and to no one else

“The degree in Oenology is really very attractive. My classmates were either winegrowers from the leading winegrowing regions, or students of Pharmacy or Economics who were doing second-cycle studies,” he says. “There was even a girl who hadn’t managed to get on a course in perfumery in Paris and decided to opt for oenology. She didn’t like cleaning out the press.” The glamour surrounding oenologists fades somewhat when you look at their hands and realise that although this is a pleasant job it is also hard. “People only notice the bucolic part. But oenology involves doing a wide range of things and in a typical working day you have to do all sorts. The only thing I refuse to do is go into the laboratory. In medium and small wineries, which make up the vast majority of wineries in Catalonia, you have to be a jack-of-all-trades. You have to be prepared to be in the press with a compressor. But you also have to attend clients and advertise your product.” Francesc is absolutely right to point out the wide variety of jobs involved in the well-established degree programme in Tarragona.

He recalls colleagues like Anna Rovira, an oenologist in Capçanes, Agustí Torelló in ATRoca and the oenologist David Barrieche, who shared oenological experiences with Toni Sánchez, from Solà d'Ares, and who is now engaged in new professional projects in the world of wine and oil at Vins i Olis Suñer in Ginestar in La Ribera d'Ebre.

"I studied in Falset during the boom years of El Priorat and almost everybody was there at one time or another." He is referring to the Jaume Ciurana School of Oenology, where good professionals such as Toni Alcover, president of the DOQ Priorat, are still working.

It was at university, however, that he made the great discoveries in the world of oenology that are still of use to him now. He has particularly fond memories of the excellent classes given by Francesca Fort Marsal, with whom he studied plant biology. "It was there that I understood what I was going to learn. When you understand what drives the plant, you understand everything." It was a five-year course: first Agricultural Engineering and then a second cycle in Oenology at the new faculty on the Sescelades Campus. "Some days I didn't finish until nine o'clock at night because while I was doing the third year of the Engineering degree I started to do some of the Oenology subjects. So you could say that I did the two degrees at once."

After his student years, during which he never gave up working the land, he has now found relative peace and quiet, and he has thrown himself body and soul into the Frisach Winery. "I work exclusively for the winery now. I like the vineyard a lot, it's a passion. And selling as well." He works every day of the year with the exception of 14-18 August, the festivities of Saint Roch and the Assumption of

the Virgin Mary. "These days are sacred. I'm not available for anyone." Throughout the time he has worked for the winery, over a decade now, he says he has learned from many other colleagues: for example, the oenologist Jaume Clua when he was in charge of the Bot Cooperative during a summer's grape picking, and also the teacher and viticulturist Agustí Villarroya, now retired. He remembers a period of intense activity working for INCAVI in Vilafranca and Reus studying varieties, treatments, new ways of growing grapes and techniques for treating grape worm. "We were responsible for monitoring the whole thing so we travelled all over Catalonia, from Espolla to Lleida." The two summer months were full of intense activity. Francesc explains that when he finished work at 3 in the afternoon in Vilafranca, he would rush back to Corbera to get the grapes into the winery. "I lost 15 kilos." "Theory is fundamental, but you need a lot of practice as well. To pass the course you should be made to spend a year at the Mas dels Frares Experimental Centre, working on the vines," he muses.

"When you start out in the wine sector, you know that it is very big but you also think that you want to make it yours," he says when I ask him about an oenologist who has made a personal and professional impression on him. He regards Jaume Clua as his mentor. Once, in a subtle attempt to keep his feet on the ground, Jaume told him that anybody could make good wines. "He's from Corbera and he's very down to earth. He also taught me that there is no need for secrets; what you need is to share knowledge and information, because you can follow other people's advice but your grapes are yours not anybody else's. At first he controlled everything I did and now I ask him to come to the winery for a tasting every year. We get on very well together,

and have done from the very beginning when I went to the Bot Cooperative on a work experience programme and he put me in charge of the micro-oxygenations. You don't forget someone putting their trust in you when you are just starting out."

Since he finished studying at the URV in Tarragona, he is the person to have taught him most. Francesc has recently been in touch with the current dean of the Faculty of Oenology, Joan Miquel Canals, because his distributor in California, Andrew Yandell from Trumpet Wine, was very interested in knowing where Francesc had learned how to make what, in his opinion, was such excellent wine.

"The dean told him all about the history of oenology at the University and how the students were taught. He told him that the classes taught them to be methodical, which is the basis for managing general knowledge. The basic scientific concepts can be acquired but it is outside the university that they are put into practice," Francesc recalls. In this regard, he points out that oenology is evolving very quickly and he accepts that all the innovations are taught in the classroom but only on paper. "At the university, the basis is always the same, but new techniques and equipment are constantly coming out. For example, we were not given anything new about irrigation, which is key to the whole process. I've been told, however, that they want to adapt to the changes. The dean said that they wanted to make the area of viticulture more diverse."

Andreu Yandell (Trumpet Wine): Francesc took me to meet the dean of the URV at my request. It seems like the perfect hatching place for new projects in wine. We are in the midst of a Spanish wine revolution, where indigenous varieties

and old vines are getting the attention they deserve from the next generation. As I'm sure Francesc or Albert Canela or Mariona Vendrell can tell you, it's not easy to break the mold, but now that they have, success is finding them. They aren't committing blasphemy with some newfound technology, but rather returning to the viticulture and winemaking their great-grandparents practiced, returning to their roots.

Trumpet Wine is a start-up wine import and distribution company based in San Francisco, California. I showcase sustainably farmed wines crafted with minimal intervention to share with aficionados in the bay area and beyond <www.trumpetwine.com/>

Francesc Ferré is aware that there is an element of teaching yourself, as there is in all subjects, but he is also sure that you must first have a “good command of the basic science”. Ten years after his course at the URV he says that he has learned that “every year is a world in itself.” “I’m constantly learning because working with varieties from here means that you have to put your own personal stamp on it, typical quality, but it is by no means easy because every year the circumstances change. It’s complex, I’ve not been at it for too long, but one thing I do know: I’ve learned a lot by listening to people from other areas, oenologists and farmers. And I know that nobody is ever totally right.”

HANDS

“We do not mature
like fruit or corn.

Green and hard we shall be
cut down by time”

“Your hands, which seemed so useless,
are now vine shoots for the fire”

Montserrat Abelló

What do your hands tell you?

They are full of signs.

What do the hands of another oenologist tell you?

It depends who. If they are damaged, then you know he works hard, that he works the land, that he squeezes the juice out of the grapes with his bare hands. It's the sign of an oenologist. You can tell a mile off which ones harvest, which ones live and breathe wine, which ones get involved.

And the hands of a sommelier?

Movement, sommeliers move their fingers a lot.

A teacher's?

They have science in them. They are thorough, with a strong pulse.

What about the hands of a wine critic?

They should be covered in ink and dirt from travelling all over the region to meet wine growers. If you're going to criticise someone else's work, you have to put yourself in their shoes. I would say, “Look, I'll give you these two rows of vines and these two vats. Do what you can in the same conditions as me and then we'll both be critical of each other.”



WINE AND LIFE'S WORK



We have the pleasure of bottling time

“Wine is nourishment that gives pleasure and our life’s work is based on ecology and the search for maximum quality.” A total of 90% of the production of white *vernatxa* in Catalonia – 33% of world production – is concentrated in Terra Alta. The Frisach Winery’s trademark is the autochthonous variety but they are also interested in producing reds.

“There are three types of wine: cash cows, which have a low profit margin but sell well; jingle bell wines, which sound very promising but can only be bought in the winery; and star wines, which are often sold abroad and which are produced in small quantities. These are the top products”. He is well aware that he has to work with all three types and every product is deliberately created to belong to one of the categories. “We have to earn a client’s loyalty with direct contact and considerable flexibility,” says Francesc Ferré in the company of his mother, Antònia Llop, who combines her job as a teacher at the Doctor Ferran school in Corbera with helping out in the winery. On the day we met, she was helping to label bottles. “If Josep from El Perelló rings on a Sunday afternoon to say he’s running out of wine, we just get in the car and go,” she says with a certain satisfaction. “And until very recently we labelled the bottles by hand, one bottle at a time. Can you imagine the work that involved? We eventually bought a machine, though.” “I got the stainless steel tanks for Christmas,” smiles Francesc. Investments are made sparingly and the family project is always at the top of their wish list.

“We have a farm so we are farmers, but businessmen too. We have to seek the greatest yield for our project. We always set our sights high but the market puts us in our place,” Francesc points out. Tired of seeing his family selling fruit for under cost price, he decided to embark on a new adventure and make his own wine. “We were selling the *vernatxa* at 9 cents so we stopped selling.” It was time to take the initiative and turn things around. He recalls Sigmund Freud’s well-known quote: “If you want something new, do something different.”

“We are happy because our two sons are happy at the head of the business,” says his mother. And she adds, “It’s a tough job. Sometimes we have to take crates of wine to the Paolet Restaurant in Tortosa because they run out at the weekend. But we’re happy to do it and it can be very satisfying.”

In 2005 the first grapes were picked and brought into the winery, at 17 degrees, and for two months they were left with the pomace in the cement tanks. “The harvest and production were very good, but there were lots of things that still had to be done and making the wine was a challenge. We had to get the tanks ready in a bit of a rush. Our destemmer was really old and for two or three years we had to borrow everything.” The adventures of the first campaign are now anecdotes, but at the time they were a real concern. The ground floor of the house was just like the ground floor of all the houses in the village: little more than an animal pen that they quickly turned into a cellar. Francesc’s father used a digger to make a space in the basement to store wines, keep the stock and label the bottles. “Now that we have the benefit of hindsight we are very happy, but they were years of hard work and sacrifice,” says Antònia.

The Frisach Winery has reached its tenth anniversary without pomp and circumstance, but with discretion and determination. To celebrate, Francesc will be presenting La Foradada, a still wine produced from *vernatxa*. It is a limited production wine: only 3,000 bottles have been produced, which such renowned sommeliers as Cèsar Cànovas from Monvínic had the privilege to taste when it was still being giving the finishing touches in the steel vat. "It's a great wine, really good. Amazing. Francesc is an oenologist who has good judgement. He asks himself a lot of questions. He is humble. And he loves the land. And when all's said and done, good wine makers all have this same common denominator."

He admires his logic when he talks about natural wines: "It's still a wine. I think that part of doing things as they should be done is to be environmentally friendly in the vineyard. But I should also say that there is more to it than that. If a natural wine has some sort of defect then it is not a good wine. We have to avoid fashion and snobbery. You have to do things because you believe in them and you can show they work," he says seriously. "La Foradada is a natural wine in which I'm searching for the breadth of the variety, its origins. In the *vernatxa* of L'Abrunet, on the other hand, I'm looking for length. It's a wine that can be kept for between 5 and 8 years." La Foradada may be a wine that contains no sulphites but Francesc goes so far as to say that all his wines "are natural". "You can taste the landscape, the smells of the vineyard: the pine, the rosemary and the thyme. I believe that everything should be autochthonous and autonomous."

"We've got a bit of a bee in our bonnet about all this," Francesc warns me during our second conversation about

natural wine. "It's certainly true that *vernatxa* oxidises quickly. Just one look and it goes off. But that does not mean to say that if you work carefully you can't get a good wine with no additives," he says. "I thought that if I didn't try it, I would never know, so I decided to make La Foradada to see what the baseline was and know that if I didn't add anything then this was the outcome. We also try to give our other wines their own personality and make them single vineyard wines." Francesc considers La Foradada to be a rustic but elegant wine. "It's like picking up a stone: if you have a lot and put them all together you can make a house." The oenologist Jaume Clua, his mentor, has this to say about Francesc's unconventional wine, which he has tasted on two different occasions while it was still in the tank: "It's just right. It's been made with the techniques to more than guarantee the minimum preservation period. It's really very good. I feel that the concept of natural wine has not been explained very well and it's poorly understood. Good conventional winemaking is already working with low levels of sulphur. It's true that natural wines have special characteristics that set them apart, but first they have to pass the test of quality and perdurability. Some are oxidised and others have excessive volatile acidity. I think you have to be careful with natural wines and more than anything else they should be honest and good quality."

“When you drink *vernatxa*, you can taste Terra Alta. There's a connection between the product and the origin

"*Abrunet* is the word we use in Corbera for a swallow and the latest thing we're trying to do here is change the name and image of the Frisach Blend and Selection. The new label is a drawing of a farmer with wings who's flying off to sell Terra Alta wines in other places." He gazes at the new labels of the first two wines that he made and which he has just labelled. It was about time for the labels to be redone and he did not want to miss the chance of collaborating with an art expert.

"I met Francesc in the library in Móra d'Ebre when I was there to do an illustrated reading with Elisenda Roca," says the illustrator Ignasi Blanch. "Elisenda read the text of the book *1714* by Jordi Sierra i Fabra, which I illustrated, and poems by several poets, while I did large-scale drawings." Blanch explains that ever since he took part in the project *East Side Gallery* on the Berlin Wall in 1990 – he was the only representative from Spain – he has been inundated with requests to do live, large-scale drawings. Móra is one of the places where he has worked; the Vall d'Hebrón Children's Hospital is another.

"After watching us perform, Francesc invited us to taste his wines at the Cota 402 in Corbera d'Ebre. The place has some magnificent views and it is one of the most emblematic places in the Terra Alta." On that occasion, Francesc took them to his home and not long afterwards he looked up Ignasi Blanch again. "He came to see me in my studio in Barcelona and he asked me to do the artwork for the new L'Abrunet. I did a drawing straight away in front of him and the next day I sent it off to him so that it could be adapted for the wine labels." They saw eye to eye right from the start. Ignasi says: "I was attracted to the idea because they were organic wines being produced by a



small, family-run winery and because such a young person as Francesc had such a deep knowledge of his region, was in direct contact with nature and was absolutely dedicated to making his project work." Blanch has now been back to the Cota 402 to see L' Abrunet fly and to taste the wines that proudly display a label full of art. "It's like *le petit vigneron de la France*. Garage wines have this sort of illustrated wine label, and we're a small winery in Terra Alta so I think the illustration is fitting," says Francesc. "At night I shut my eyes but I don't go to sleep. When I first had the idea it made me feel very happy but then I couldn't stop turning it over in my mind. In the end, I think it has been a qualitative step forward: we had a good product but it wasn't packaged right. Now it's more down to earth, it attracts people's attention and it's going to help us sell more."

L'Abrunet are two special wines, the first ones to be produced at the winery, and they are a faithful reflection of the varieties that can be found in the Terra Alta Designation of Origin.

Karme is a sparkling wine created, in Francesc's words, "in memory of our grandmas. It's a wine that has been made and designed from the heart. It is unique, unrepeatable, well-rooted to the land, made as they would have made it and presented in the language that they spoke and that we still speak. It's a sparkling *vernatxa* that expresses ties to a region, origins, identity, a clear history, which has the character of our people. It contains the deepest instinct of our land. Like they do."

In the Terra Alta, *vernatxa* (Grenache Blanc) is the word used to refer to the vine. According to Francesc, "it gives character, singularity and spirit" to his wines. A committed champion of autochthonous varieties, Francesc defines the



relationship between the vine and Terra Alta on the label: "It's the most deeply rooted variety, the primary instinct of our people. It's a vine that has lasted throughout history; it is virgin, wild and fruitful, like the land itself. We have the pleasure of bottling time." He has decided to go back to his roots and produce a *vernatxa* just as his ancestors did. "I wanted to express the Terra Alta; I wanted to see and drink it," he says. Likewise he has gone back to old winemaking techniques. He is constantly paying tribute to his ancestors.

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of the Battle of the Ebro, a wine was presented in the middle of the summer in Corbera Old Town. The label and the name were a little surprising:

25/juliol/1938...cel ras i oratge sec.
 Sol de justícia, aquella que tardarà en arribar.
 Creixen brots massa tendres,
 poc enfiutats, no s'esperen allò que vindrà.
 Retronen les valls, se baden les pedres, olor a terra cremada.
 Volades de corbs que tapen lo cel, fugen en desbandada.
 Ceps marcats en metralla, estan verolant,
 i sense adonar-se'n agafen lo color de la sang,
 espectants davant l'amarga baralla.
 Tornen los corbs i tot està erm,
 a cops de sol i de llom rebroten de vida.
 Lo vi fa sang.

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 ESPAÑA



It is a striking text written about the wine Sang de Corb (Crow's Blood), made from *vernatxa* and Carignan and which spends a year in the barrel so that Francesc can apply the finishing touches. The wine is an emotional one:

it pays tribute to the farm workers who fell at the Battle of the Ebro. "It is fresh but also full bodied, complex and subtle," he explains as we taste it from the vat and note that process towards the type of wine that he is seeking is starting. It reminds you that during the Spanish Civil War, which filled the land with mines and misery, the vineyards in this region saw a lot of spilled blood. "The vines are 65 years old and they grow alongside red and hairy *vernatxa*, and Carignan. We put the wine in the cask for a while to tone down its rusticity but never for so long that it tastes as if it were from elsewhere." At the Frisach winery they are all in favour of making wine from black grape varieties and they say that the north winds and the warm south-westerlies prevent humidity and help the grapes to grow. We want our wines to put Terra Alta on the map," says Francesc.

"I go round and taste the wines every two or three days. It's an indicator of how they are evolving. There are some incredible surprises from one day to the next." He never takes his eye off the winery or the various vineyards which he constantly tends with his father. The vines and some of the land are their own, and the rest of the land they rent. Looking down from Cota 402, Francesc likes to sketch out the mosaic of his winemaking project. The *vernatxa* comes from the farm known as the Quart (The Quarter), which acquired this name because it takes 15 minutes to get there from the village. The soil is clay-limestone and stony, and in the top section it is *panal*, the typical soil of the Terra Alta. This is where he makes L'Abrunet and Vernatxa. He grows the Grenache grapes at the farm El Molí de la Vila, where the soil is all *panal*. "These are the best vines I have," he says. He has more *vernatxa* at a higher altitude at Vall de

Canelles and Carignan at Creveta, a very old farm which was probably originally known as Creueta. We paid a visit to another of his farms – D'allà el Riu – where the old vines are a mixture of red *vernatxa*, hairy *vernatxa* and Carignan and from where you can take a postcard-type photo of Corbera d'Ebre.

Like the tendril that grips the vine in the Celler Frisach's logo, Francesc also clings on to the wines that he has brought to life. "In the red L'Abrunet I play with orography and the different ripening times of the Carignan and the *vernatxa* because they are long- and short-cycle varieties, respectively. We try to join the ying and the yang, the ripest part with the greenest part. We put the wine in cement tanks and for five months we move the lees. I focus on colour and concentration, elegance, simplicity, fragility and fluidity." He likes explaining the process that every wine undergoes and points out that no two harvests are the same. "It's just like the oranges or any of the other fruits – peaches or plums – that are around here. The climate is fundamental for rhythm and ripening," he says.

The typical characteristics of a wine do not depend only on soil, variety, climate and human intervention. At the Frisach Winery there is a fifth element: language. "If you forget where you come from, you lose your identity," Francesc often proclaims. From the very start he knew that he wanted to conserve the typical traits of the language spoken in Corbera – Terra Alta Catalan – so he got in touch with the doctor in Catalan Philology at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Pere Navarro Gómez, so that he could ensure his texts were authentic and accurate. "When he told me who he was and asked how he should label Karne, the wine he produced in tribute to the two grandmothers,

I was very pleasantly surprised by his idea of using the colloquial language characteristic of Terra Alta," said Navarro, author of the book *Aproximació geolingüística als parlars de la Ribera d'Ebre* (*Geolinguistic Approach to the Speech of the Ribera d'Ebre*) and supervisor of Olga Cubells Bartolomé's doctoral thesis *The Speech of the Ribera d'Ebre. A Geolinguistic Study*. "I have always thought that the way people speak is not just a part of the designation of origin; the most immediate designation of origin of people is the language they speak. When people speak they reveal who they are," reflects Navarro. And he adds, "Language is immaterial heritage and right from the start I thought that it went very well with the labelling of a wine from the Terra Alta. The Frisach Winery has combined material heritage with immaterial heritage, wine with language."

Doctor Navarro recalls that he first met Antònia Llop, Francesc's mother, during a summer course for primary-school teachers in Terra Alta. When Francesc mentioned that he wanted to use spoken Catalan on his labels, she suggested that he got in touch with him. "I was very excited about the project. As far as I know it is the first time that a winery has done it. Francesc has taken a twofold risk: first, he has decided to work the land and make wine while still a young man and, second, he has made a clear language choice for the label. He's a brave man," says Navarro. Although they are not personal friends, Pere Navarro feels so close to the Frisach Winery that he presented the wine Sang de Corb. "I felt very much at home during the presentation. The whole project – a wine that pays tribute to the people of Corbera, people who sacrificed their lives for democracy – is very much to my liking." According to Navarro, the typical features of the spoken language "give

the project a considerable symbolic charge” and “it is of particular merit that this is being done by a young man. The young don’t usually have such sensitivity.” In his work as a university lecturer he always tells his students that children should be taught the local language variety, not the standard. “The spoken language should be given the value it deserves. We mustn’t forget that we learn to speak before we learn to read and write, and as children we use colloquial language to speak to our family and friends.” However, the spoken language is often not held in such high regard and by using it to bring his wine closer to the general public Francesc has had to go against the grain. Pere Navarro was born in Cambrils but his father’s family came from Tivissa so he has always been familiar with Western Catalan. “It is a variety that has its own particular features, just like all regional varieties. But technically, and just like the whole of the Terres de l’Ebre region in general, the language is not homogenous. It has features from Tortosa and Lleida. And these two identities converge in Corbera.”

L’Abrunet – the swallow – is another use of the spoken language of the Terra Alta as a sign of identity. “Things like this bring the community together,” says Navarro. “The language forms that are largely regarded as inferior are given value. Nobody has to feel like a second-class citizen for reasons of language.”



If your land is alive,
you wines are alive

"The Saint Madrona spring, finds solutions for difficult things," he intones as we make our way to the village chapel. He explains that he is totally involved in the cultural life of the village. "I take part in the *correfocs* (fire running) and I'm a member of the Saint Christopher Committee." On our way back from the chapel, the meeting point for the village festival, we stop at Allà el Riu.

The *vernatxa*, hairy *vernatxa* and Carignan are all mixed up. The vines are more than 65 years old and were cut back several weeks ago. It's now February but here they do the pruning before Christmas. "In the south of Europe there has always been the problem of the grape disease *esca*, which is a combination of more than 65 fungi which attack the vine's vascular system. Vines become infected because fungal spores enter through the open pruning wound. That's why we prune early and why the wound has completely closed. The start of the good weather is not a problem," he explains. "You have to take good care of vines. Sometimes they catch a disease because of a pruning wound and sometimes because of other features of the environment. So we have to be very strict with the land." He finishes by saying that "we must have a good base if we are to produce the best grapes in the region."

Plant cover and vines surrounded by fossils, clover, violets and legumes. Darkness has crept up on us but the biodiversity in the vineyard fills it with colour. The landscape around Corbera is wholly agricultural, made up of olive groves, almond trees, peach trees and vineyards. "My father was always very aware that if you want to live off the land, you have to treat it as well and as naturally as you can." The grass is still dry and there is no sign of weeping, it is one of the most exciting moments of the change from winter to spring. "The vine doesn't weep



until the soil is at a temperature of 12 degrees. When it gets hotter, the enzyme system starts working and the sap oozes out of the pruning wound,” Francesc explains.

“We’ve rented this plot of vines from an old man. I told him I’d look after it for him because these grapes could be used for a top-of-the-range wine.” At the foot of the emblematic Serra de Cavalls, 1,000 vines of three different

varieties stretch into the distance, a testimony to the winemaking tradition of Corbera. In the background, there is a priceless view of La Foradada.

We talk of farmers as the guardians of the landscape. Francesc Ferré says, "They prevent fires and help depressed areas to become economically active."

“Everything starts in the vineyard,
the origin is the vine. But just as
some people waste their lives
away, some vines have no soul

He transmits the energy imbued in him by the vines to everyone around him and he is the first to admit that he has "a pretty good job." "We help people lose consciousness," he chuckles. We have lunch together in Corbera and in the restaurant our glasses are changed so that we can taste the white L'Abrunet. "I cannot fight for this land from the shelves of Lidl; that is why I need to sell my wine in places where I can explain what this land is," he explains. Restaurants are one of the mainstays of his project, as are specialist wine shops. He lists a few, including Tannat and Temps de Terra in Barcelona where he has tastings planned. The wines from the Frisach Winery sell mainly in the Terres de l'Ebre, Barcelona, Lleida and Andorra. And they are exported to the USA, Holland and Germany. When he started, he was producing 5,000 bottles; now that figure has increased to 30,000. However, he is quick to point out that "the commercial margin on each bottle sold is very small."

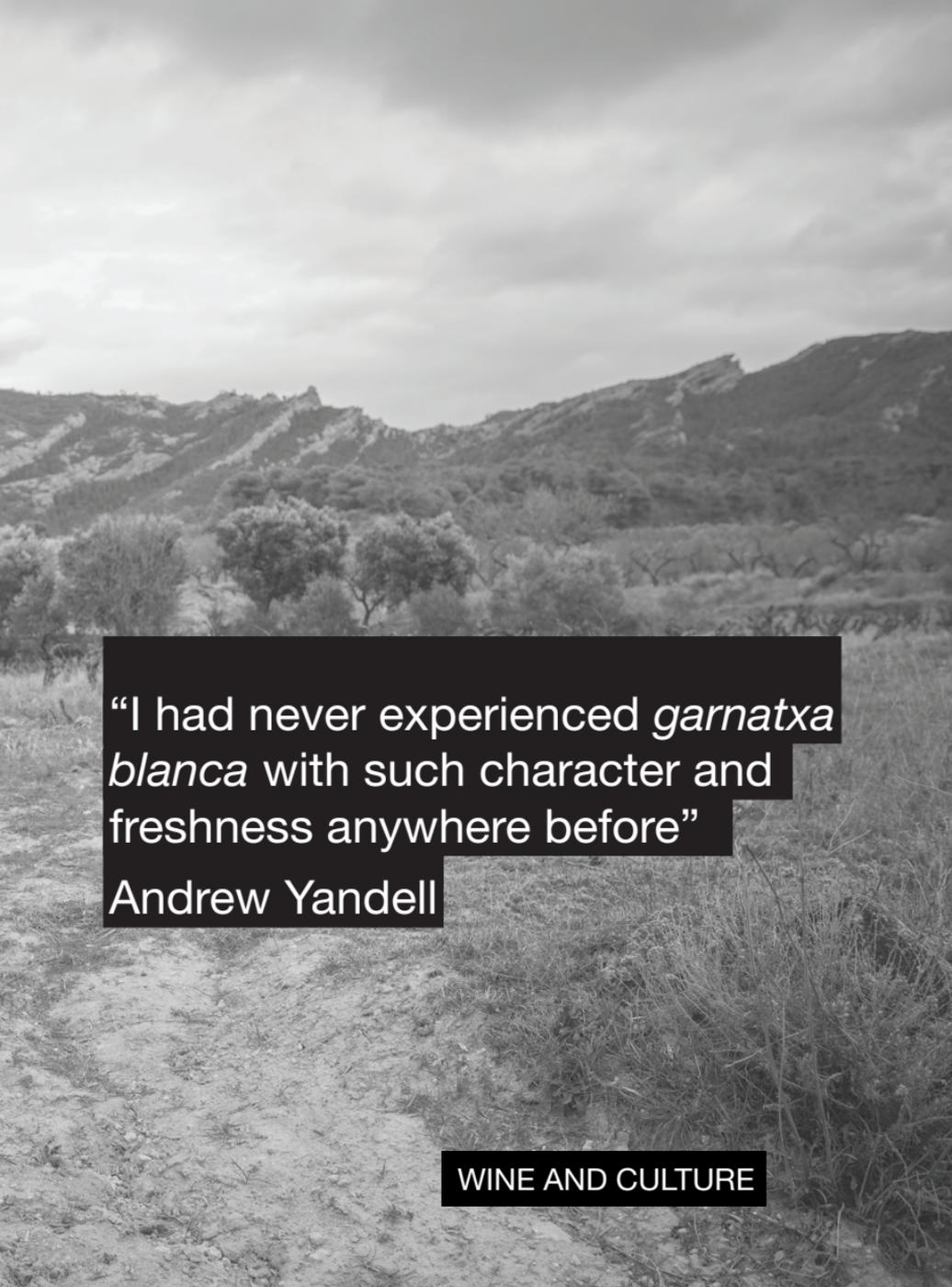
It is a hard job which is made easier by our sharing a bottle of young white wine. We can taste the Spanish broom, the honey and the almonds, the suggestive aromas of the

season that we can smell when we open the window in Corbera d'Ebre. "For me drinking wine must be a pleasure. We make it to enjoy it. Otherwise it makes no sense." He transmits this enthusiasm for producing wine on the social networks. "On Facebook, I try to sell the culture of wine, which unfortunately is no longer at the heart of family life. At home we've always had wine on the table. My grandfather would take a quick nip and then dribble some on our bread for us," he says. "If you're taught how to tie your laces when you're small, you end up knowing how to do it." You can learn to love wine in exactly the same way, although he is aware that the experience he has had is not a general one.

"For me the social networks have been the key to getting my work known. When I started out, no one knew who I was and when I started producing my own wines they helped me a lot," he says, convinced of the advantages of tools such as Facebook where he clearly seeks "friends, potential clients and subscribers." The idea is that the contacts on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter can say, "I can see this and I want it." They can see something they want or desire. The wines are increasingly being talked about in the press and just recently an article in *La Vanguardia* was pouring praise on Sang de Corb. "First thing in the morning someone told me that I was in *La Vanguardia*. And the first thing I thought was 'What have I done?'" he smiled.

We spoke about his communication strategy, which he also coordinates when he has time. "Taking photos isn't work if it's what you like doing. And I like it." Meanwhile, he tells me about how he produces his wines. "I don't like to give wine many notes of wood. Only the microoxygenation." And when his winery can afford it, he will make a trip to New Zealand to continue the process of lifelong learning.





“I had never experienced *garnatxa blanca* with such character and freshness anywhere before”

Andrew Yandell

WINE AND CULTURE



Francesc has revitalized the art of traditional winemaking in Terra Alta

“Wines in the trenches” is an enotouristic activity organised jointly by the Frisach Winery and the tour guide company Terra Enllà run by the journalist Andreu Caralt and the anthropologist and educator Maite Hernández. Both specialists in the Battle of the Ebro, they have seen that the walking tours around the Old Town, a historical place protected by the Catalan Government, are an opportunity for people to get to know the region and its history, rounded off with a wine tasting at the mythical Cota 402, the command point of the 35th Republican International Division. The tour begins in the Corbera d’Ebre Old Town and, as the guide books say, from the town you can see “a striking landscape with evocative streets, the sculptural ensemble of the Alphabet of Freedom, the naked church and the impressive bell tower.” The tour is full of experiences and tales that Andreu and Maite present on paper and in digital format. They leave no one indifferent. The Old Town lies in ruins and is “a unique testament to the Battle of the Ebro.”

A wild northerly wind was blowing on the day of our visit, the first weekend in February. It is a reminder that these peaceful lands have not always been like this; in the past they were the stage of a savage bloodbath. Terra Enllà reminds us that “more than 75 years have passed but the ruins are still being preserved [...]. Corbera d’Ebre contemplates how the vines that were once witness to, and

victims of, the cruelty of warfare burst into flower and bring the region back to life.”

The vines are an opportunity, the future for this difficult, rugged landscape that is often misunderstood and ignored. It has been a mosaic of cultures, a place through which many civilisations have passed, the epicentre of bloody battles that many just want to forget. But not Francesc’s generation, who stake their claim to history and do not want it to be forgotten. Francesc believes that it should serve as an example and that wine is one of the best instruments for doing so. He was the first to believe in the possibilities of the countryside as a backdrop for his wine tastings. Now a practical and spiritual alliance with Terra Enllà enables them to share the guided tour. He supervises the tasting at one of the most impressive vantage points in the region, where he talks of vicissitudes and misery, the reasons for his wines.

“This is virgin territory. We have nothing but almond trees, vines and olive groves. It’s the Catalan Tuscany.” He is convinced by the beauty of the landscape. And it is easy to agree with him, especially when the sun rises and begins to warm the day. As spring approaches, the image is Dantesque, beautiful, impressive. “I prefer the autumn because there is a wider range of colours, the light is more nuanced and on some days I feel like recording the views from above,” says Francesc, knowing full well that the photographer with us, Maoz Eliakim, has a drone in his backpack. He promises that he’ll let him know when he comes back to film the region from the air.

“As I was saying, I was looking for Francesc for some time before I met him. Terra Alta is a stunning landscape, the Tuscany of Catalonia, as Francesc says. The mountainous

elevations, sun, nightly winds, and rocky terrain give the place a sense of potential that kept me coming back, looking for wine that expressed it." Andrew Yandell was convinced that Terra Alta would produce highly personal wines and he did not stop looking until he found Francesc. "I asked everyone who would listen about finding good *garnatxa blanca* in Terra Alta, to no avail. That is, until a late-night dinner with Albert Canela and Mariona Vendrell (celler Succés Vinícola) over a bottle of some incredible Carriel dels Vilars 2001 Brut Nature Reserva from Empordà. They inspired me with their fresh take on Trepat (their new Parellada is delicious!), and were one of the first producers I signed, so naturally I trusted their taste."

They were put in touch by Mariona and Albert, who work on their winegrowing project out of the incubator for wine businesses in Barberà de la Conca, a pioneering European project. They knew Francesc because they had studied together at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili. "They told me about a boy from Terra Alta they'd studied with who was working with *garnatxa blanca* in Corbera D'Ebre, and while they hadn't tried it, they gave me his number."

Andrew Yandell did not take long to get in touch. Trumpet Wines were in no doubt from the very start. Mariona and Albert are incredible wine makers so they were bound to have made an excellent recommendation.

What Andrew says about Francesc speaks for itself. "Francesc and I tried his wine over dinner in Vilalba dels Arcs. I had never experienced *garnatxa blanca* with such character and freshness anywhere before, much less Terra Alta. Instead of waiting for the grapes to get overly ripe and fat, he picks his fruit the minute it's ready, often a week before his neighbours. The vines still express *terroir*



at this point, before varietal character overwhelms the nuance of his calcareous clay soils. The nightly winds that run through Corbera to the windmills maintain the grapes' acidity and keep their sugar levels low as they ripen, making for complex, refreshing wine. It's a combination of his soil, and the way he farms it, and his traditional hands-off winemaking that makes his juice so special. Of course, one cannot get the mineral zing and long finish Francesc cultivates in his wine without living soil, nor the unique character without native yeasts. Instead of using chemical additives, over-extraction, or excess sulphur, he employs the nearly forgotten technique of cofermentation and ferments his whites with the skins to stabilize his creations."



He clearly understands Francesc's connection to the *terroir*, his careful work and obstinacy; but he also understands the whole production process that seeks new forms of expression in tradition. He enjoys the wines produced by the Frisach Winery and the work put in by the young oenologist, about whom he says, "Francesc has revitalized the art of traditional winemaking in Terra Alta."

All his clients work in a similar way: "The wines come from living soils, organically farmed by small producers, are fermented with naturally occurring yeasts, and have nothing added to them but a touch of SO₂, sometimes". On his list are Sara Pérez and René Barbier, viticultors from the DOQ Priorat, Mas Candí DO Penedès, Carriel dels Vilars DO Empordà and Succés Vinícola DO Conca de Barberà, among others. Andrew Yandell concludes: "I'm grateful to work with the talented, thoughtful, authentic people that make Trumpet Wine what it is. I have wines from ten producers with me in California, with more on deck."

It is thanks to him that the wines from the Frisach Winery have travelled as far as San Francisco, probably the point furthest from Terra Alta where his wine is sold. Andrew's contribution has been fundamental to place it in restaurants with Michelin stars on the west coast. "I sell Francesc's wines all over the greater bay area (San Francisco, Oakland, etc.) and will take it south to Los Angeles when I open the market there this summer." *Vernatxa* is about to embark on its American adventure and Francesc is looking forward to seeing it personally this coming summer. Andrew Yandell has managed to sell the wines to restaurants, wine bars and wine retailers. "Each of Francesc's wines over-delivers for its price. They pair very well with the food here, as they have the balance, structure, acidity to match up to almost

anything, or nothing. The blend is as delicious by itself as with a steak, and his *garnatxas* work well with anything from fish to pork chops." The versatility of Terra Alta is beginning to be recognised beyond our borders. These days, Frisach's white L'Abrunet has found an exceptional pairing with the crayfish from Sant Carles de la Ràpita, but Sang de Corb is looking forward to tempting meals in California.

“In the time I was on the front, I did and saw more things than in the 50 years afterwards

The sentence belongs to Miquel Flamarich, enlisted for the Battle of the Ebro under the baby-bottle conscription. All the tourists who take part in the Terra Enllà tour hear it, internalise it and reflect on it. Francesc is one of them. He is shocked to find out how the war affected Corbera, its inhabitants, and the agriculture of the region. Terra Enllà mentions one of the volumes of the collection *La Batalla del Ebro* by Lluís Mezquida that gives data about the municipality of Gandesa. These data could also be applicable to Corbera d'Ebre although they may be even worse because of the way in which the civil population was attacked. The text cited states the following: "Before the war there were 5.4 million vines, of which 2.16 were lost. Of the original 29,600 olive trees, 11,840 were destroyed and the initial 33,000 almond trees were reduced by 13,200.

The Frisach Winery does not forget: on the contrary, it tries to keep the memory alive. It takes every opportunity to remind wine lovers of the dramatic history of the town.





The reality must be known, faced up to and used for the benefit of the town. Terra Enllà is doing a good job in this respect but wine tourism and historical tourism are taking an extra step. Recently, a photo walk was organised through the Old Town with the help of *Terres Magazine*. The authors of the magazine wrote the following: "In Terra Alta there's nothing better than wine to allow us to enjoy the history, culture and landscape of an extremely valuable region that, bit by bit, is losing its fear. The first bottles of red Sang de Corb saw the light of day in the year that the 75th anniversary of the end of the Battle of the Ebro was commemorated. It was presented on 25 July in Corbera d'Ebre Old Town. It was the perfect stage and it showed us that wine can help us to remember a tragic past that will always be an open wound."

Corbera d'Ebre is home to the 115 days interpretation centre of the Memorial Consortium of the Battle of the Ebro, which, as the website reminds us, "was a conflict that tragically imperilled the lives and ideals of countless people." The centre recalls "the misfortune of the almost 2,500 inhabitants that then lived there," in the Old Town at the top of the Montera hill. The only aim is to "call on reflection and the emotions to help bring about a reconciliation with the past." This is what the wine from the Frisach Winery also attempts to do and it brings to mind the lines written by Vicent Andrés Estellés: "Wine lit up the table, lit up the house, lit up life."

PERSONAL JOURNIES





BURTON

Clos de Cort

Clos de Cort

“Why so much ego? It’s Terra Alta that makes end consumers buy, not their ego

“You always associate particular wines to particular moments,” replies Francesc when I ask him to name a wine that defines him at this stage of his professional life, 10 years after he started out. He says that he still hasn’t got enough perspective but that his choice of a wine depends on his mood or the time of life. “I think that I’m going through a pensive, reflexive stage, and the wine that is best for this state of mind is structured and complex. When you drink it, it’s like being faced with yourself, like questioning yourself,” he muses. “I don’t believe that the best wine in the world exists.”

Wine regions

“I like Italy a lot. Italian wines are surprising. And of course there’s the landscape of Tuscany and Piedmont, and Sant Gimignano, where they produce *vernatxa* as well.” He admires the Italians because they seek subtlety and air in wine, whereas Catalonia has focused more on concentration. “I’ll definitely jump in my car as soon as I can or find some other way of getting there. I haven’t had a holiday for three years.”

He also plans to travel to California soon to find out what Andrew Yandell is doing with his wines. “What interests me there is to find out the commercial slant, to find out how they manage to get a top price for a three-year-old wine. They certainly know how to sell. That’s why I’m looking

forward to getting to know the place, which also produces good wines. They value the intangible things about wine – we do not, at least not yet – and see it in the bottle. I'm really looking forward to it." He confesses, however, that he will not only be visiting wineries and tasting wine. Andrew has promised that he'll take him surfing. I ask him if he's ever been before. "No," he says. "But that's what California is all about."

I ask him about France, the country that oenologists look to, particularly Bordeaux and Burgundy. "I like the way they understand wine," he says. "Just as I like the way they understand wine in Priorat. My approach is 'I'm a winemaker, I produce wines, I defend my wines, I believe in their potential, I like my work'. This is an essential philosophy that encompasses the wine and vineyard."

Gastronomic route

He lives out of a suitcase. We speak on the phone because we can't find a gap in our schedules to meet. He has just arrived from Andorra so I ask him how things went. "We've got it," he chuckles. But the place he really likes to go to get away from it all is Mas d'en Curto, between Perelló and Rasquera, not far from where he lives. "Their philosophy is like ours. I think it was the first *casa rural*, a sort of guest house in the middle of the country, in the Terres de l'Ebre. They have a restaurant, too, and to get there you have to drive for three and a half kilometres along a track through the forest." You have to really want to go there. "Time comes to a standstill at the Mas d'en Curto among the pines and surrounded by hens, ducks and fruit trees. And all the produce is used by the restaurant. All the dishes are quite elaborate and Rosa, the owner, always

View from Cota 402



makes sure that they are typical of the Terres de l'Ebre. It's fantastic to see the *carbassera* and then how they serve it up in batter. You can arrive at two o'clock in the afternoon and still be there at seven o'clock in the evening. You really get away from it all. There are views of the Serra de Cardó. It's an area known as Els Burgans and its microclimate is really relaxing." In other words, "cuisine that is honest and creative with organic products."

Another of Francesc Ferré's musts in the Terres de l'Ebre is the Miravall restaurant in Batea. "I love the place, it's in Terra Alta and Ricard Vidal, the owners' son, is young and has made some interesting changes to the menu. It gives good value for money. We believe in young people who work well. He's coming along nicely and that's good to see." Ricard prepares tasting menus, elaborate dishes, and uses extra virgin olive oil from the Terres de l'Ebre and wines from the best wineries in Terra Alta. In comparison with the day-to-day cooking of the previous generation, it's a revolution.



“In Barcelona I always make special mention of Jordi Cruz’s Àbac restaurant because it was the first top restaurant to put its trust in our wines and we’re on the tasting menu,” he reveals. “We get on very well with the chef David Andrés Morera. He’s the head of the kitchen and the person we always get in touch with. It’s good to see the youngsters putting up a fight. Not long ago he was awarded the San Pellegrino Young Chef 2015 prize.” He always talks enthusiastically about colleagues who are putting their back into things in the wine and gastronomy sector. “The Somiatruites in Igualada is haute cuisine at reasonable prices. The menu of the day costs 12 euros. Whenever I’m in the area, I pay them a visit. David Andrés’ brother is an architect and they have both been involved in the project in the capital city of Anoia. The dishes are really quite elaborate. You can have a plate of macaroni but it’s presented and cooked quite differently. The same goes for the potato omelette. Our L’Abrunet is the house wine there.”

He gets all he can out of each experience. I suppose this is a mixture of character and his short but solid career. When we talk on the phone he is still savouring the first prize at the 18th Queretes Wine Fair, the only event of this sort in Teruel that brings together wineries from Lower Aragon and the Terra Alta Designation of Origin. "The prize in Queretes for Sang de Corb as the best red wine is better than any first prize at an international competition. My future clients are here in the region," he says proudly. He is quite happy that wineries from Terra Alta such as Bàrbara Forès, and the Cooperative of Bot and Batea were also in Queretes. "The other Terra Alta wineries are my colleagues; my competitors are beer and Coca Cola."

"In Terra Alta, we help each other out. The wineries are small and we all give each other a hand: I ask Jordi Miró for his corking machine, another friend for their pulp pump and someone else for their packaging machine. If we know someone who is buying bottles, we ask him to order a pallet for us. We're all in the same boat. The more people hear about Terra Alta the better. Why so much ego? It's Terra Alta that makes end consumers buy, not ego."



Barcelona

Bar Brutal – Can Cisa: “We haven’t managed to get them to buy our wines yet but I would like our wines to be on sale there. It deals exclusively in natural, non-organic wines. I’ll try again with La Foradada when it comes on the market.”

<http://www.cancisa.cat/>

Monvínic: “It’s a very good establishment with a good name. I have Cèsar Cànovas and Joan Gómez Pallarès to thank for getting my wines in there. They serve our Sang de Corb and the Vernatxa.”

<http://www.monvinic.com/>

Bar à vins/ Moritz Barcelona: “We’re glad to have been able to hold a tasting there, which may be what we need to do for them to start serving our wines. These are leading establishments and we should not underestimate them.”

<http://moritz.com/ca/seccio/moritz-bar-vins>

Francesc Ferré's wine bars

Terres de l'Ebre

Vinoteca Tanins (Tortosa): "This was the first wine shop to buy my products and I'll always be grateful for that. I went there laden down with boxes of organic wine and they had just been thinking about selling one by the glass. Jordi and I decided which one would be best and we've been there ever since." The wine shop has a wide range of wines, *caves* and craft beers from the Terres de l'Ebre, and you can taste the wines and have some amusing snacks.

<http://www.taninsvinoteca.com/es>

Lleida

Vinicia: "We had a great time with Gregori, Jordi, Raül and Marc – who are like a small family – when we organised the tasting. They told me to bring all my wines and I even took Karme along and I disgorged it in front of everybody. So many tastings with *cava* and champagne producers and they'd never seen a bottle being disgorged until I showed them." It is a specialised shop with a wide range of wines that invites you to "let yourself be seduced by wine."

<http://reskyt.com/es/tiendas/vinicia>

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<https://www.instagram.com/cellerfrisach/>



A man with dark, curly hair and a beard is looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a blue, textured knit sweater over a white t-shirt. He is seated at a table with a red tablecloth. In the foreground, there is a white napkin and a large, empty wine glass. The background features a wooden panel wall and a white wall above it.

WHAT PEOPLE THINK

Jaume Clua, oenologist

“Francesc and I are virtually from the same family so I’m a bit biased. When he was a little boy, he would roam the streets of Corbera with his brother. Their family taught them to work from a very early age and they never stop. And Francesc seems to know how to be everywhere at once. I gave them a hand with their first harvest when they decided not to sell their grapes on and start to make their own wine and again when Francesc started his own project. I’ve always been available if he’s had any questions. Considering the conditions in which they started, the Frisach Winery has come a long way in only ten years. Francesc is interested in everything that goes on around him, he’s always on the move, always making presentations, always involved in the social networks. But more important than all that is that he is fronting a very solid venture and the quality of his wines is more than good enough. He’s been smart enough to get on in life, which can’t be said of the Corbera Cooperative, clearly outstripped by such other cooperatives as Batea, Bot and Gadesa. And he’s managed to do it with limited resources. In the end, people recognise a good job well done. He has never stopped, either when he was a student or now, because his family has shown him the value of hard work. If you ask me what has most surprised me of all that I have tasted, I would have to say the young white *vernatxa*. Now it’s a well-shaped wine, very varietal, but back then, three or four harvests ago, I was taken by surprise when I tasted it out of the vat. It was out of this world, more tropical than now, but I remember saying that it was pretty good considering it was just starting out. I think Francesc has worked hard on the vinification, the history and the phonetics of wines. The results are obvious.”

David Andrés Morera, head of the kitchen at the Àbac restaurant and owner of El Somiatruites

“I was introduced to the Frisach Winery by the sommelier at the Àbac when our wine was coming from a young distributor who was showing us interesting new things. We were very surprised when he suddenly told us that the winery had stopped producing although we found out later that in fact it was the distributor who owed money to the winery. Well, we liked the wine a lot, we knew a little about Francesc (he is only a little older than me), and we approved of the close connection with the land so I gave him a call because I wanted to sell some of his wines at the Somiatruites in Igualada. He almost had a fit when I asked him why he had decided to stop producing. He said his store room was full of the stuff. That was the beginning of a nice relationship and we put his wines back on the list at the Àbac and the Somiatruites. The *vernatxa* is incredible, but it’s more than just the wine; it’s his enthusiasm. He’s young but he’s trying to do things as well as he can. He was in the vineyard when I called but he managed to find the time to bring us the wine. We got on just fine. At the Somiatruites we have the red and white L’Abrunet and at the Àbac we have the *vernatxa* on the tasting menu, which is 80% of all our business. I always speak well of it. It’s a house wine that is very easy to drink; it transports you to Terra Alta. It’s been on the tasting menu for two and a half years now and, for a wine, that’s a record that is going to be difficult to beat. But it’s worth it because the guy who makes it loves the product and is very close to the client.”

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Ruth Troyano Puig

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DO Terra Alta

FRANCESC FERRÉ

Jaume Clua [oenologist]:



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