



Wine Portraits

Anna Espelt

DO Empordà

Anna Espelt

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Tarragona, 2016

*“Marked by the land where I was born,
I want to be as clear and open as it is.
I pretend to have no other virtue.
All that I have is enough. Past and present
I have dreamt of opening up pathways of understanding,
That everyone shall be able to follow some day.
My eyes retain the strength of colours,
And I breathe joy from the land,
(...)
I want to feel vibrant and sensitive.*

Montserrat Vayreda Trullol, *Els Pobles de l'Empordà*

*Marcada per la terra on he nascut,
Oberta com és ella, vull ser clara.
No pretenc posseir altra virtut.
Tot el que tinc m'és prou. Adés i ara
somnia obrir camins entenedors,
els que tothom podrà seguir algun dia.
Retinc als ulls la força dels colors,
respiro de la terra l'alegria,
[...]
Vull sentir-me vibrant i receptiva.*

Montserrat Vayreda Trullol, Els Pobles de l'Empordà

PADDLING IN THE SEA in L'Empordà with her mother. Eating sea urchins with a glass of *Terres Negres*, a wine that is part of the Espelt Winery's *terroir* trilogy. It is made from the fruit of vines planted between 1934 and 1954, some 22 years before Anna was born on the feast of Saint Ferriol in 1976, a Saturday in the middle of the grape harvest. "My father – Damià – should have gone grape picking but he didn't show up. My grandfather – Lluís – wasn't at all happy until he realised why," she revealed.

The initial impression is that she has got everything she could possibly have wished for. She is a biologist and an oenologist who speaks restlessly and expressively. She is easy to talk to but she has depth and a fine irony. A reflective 38-year-old woman who has found peace in the chaos of life, she never stops looking to the future and the past. She has just finished piecing together her family tree and she is as interested in discovering snippets from her past as she is in tackling future projects. Vines require patience and she is aware that she has to go at their pace and not hers. "I tend to have lots of things on the go at once and just at the moment I've got two things on my mind although I realise I've got to finish off other things first."

She is the third generation of a family of winegrowers from L'Empordà and an avid traveller. A few years ago, in the bar in Tokyo that bears the name of Espelt, she wrote the following: "L'Empordà in every glass / Roots that go deep /

Unexpected bonds / Binding tight.” She did not manage to get there for its official opening because she was pregnant with one of her three daughters – Lola, Martina and Clara. Anna took over managing the winegrowing and oenological sides of the Espelt Winery in the year 2000 and was rather disappointed that she had been unable to travel the world first. One of her favourite books is *Encara no sé com sóc (I still don't know what I am like)* by the writer from L'Empordà Maria Àngels Vayreda and she has now made the title her own and is convinced that the wines from L'Empordà know where they are going. She discovered the potential of L'Empordà's wineries while she was preparing a tasting for Monvínic a few months ago. “L'Empordà is where the Pyrenees disappear into the sea. It's a very diverse area, mainly the Cap de Creus, with slopes and valleys, and geologically complex granite and slate soils.” It is a land of diversity and contrast but with features all of its own and not just the capricious Tramontane wind.

Anna has a degree in Biology and Oenology and the vines of Mas Marés are very dear to her. Planted on the Cap de Creus headland, the contrast with the beautiful blue of the Gulf of Roses takes the breath away. You need a 30-second silence and a deep breath to understand the dimensions involved. It is wilder than anywhere else in L'Empordà and the subtle scent of thyme is all pervading.

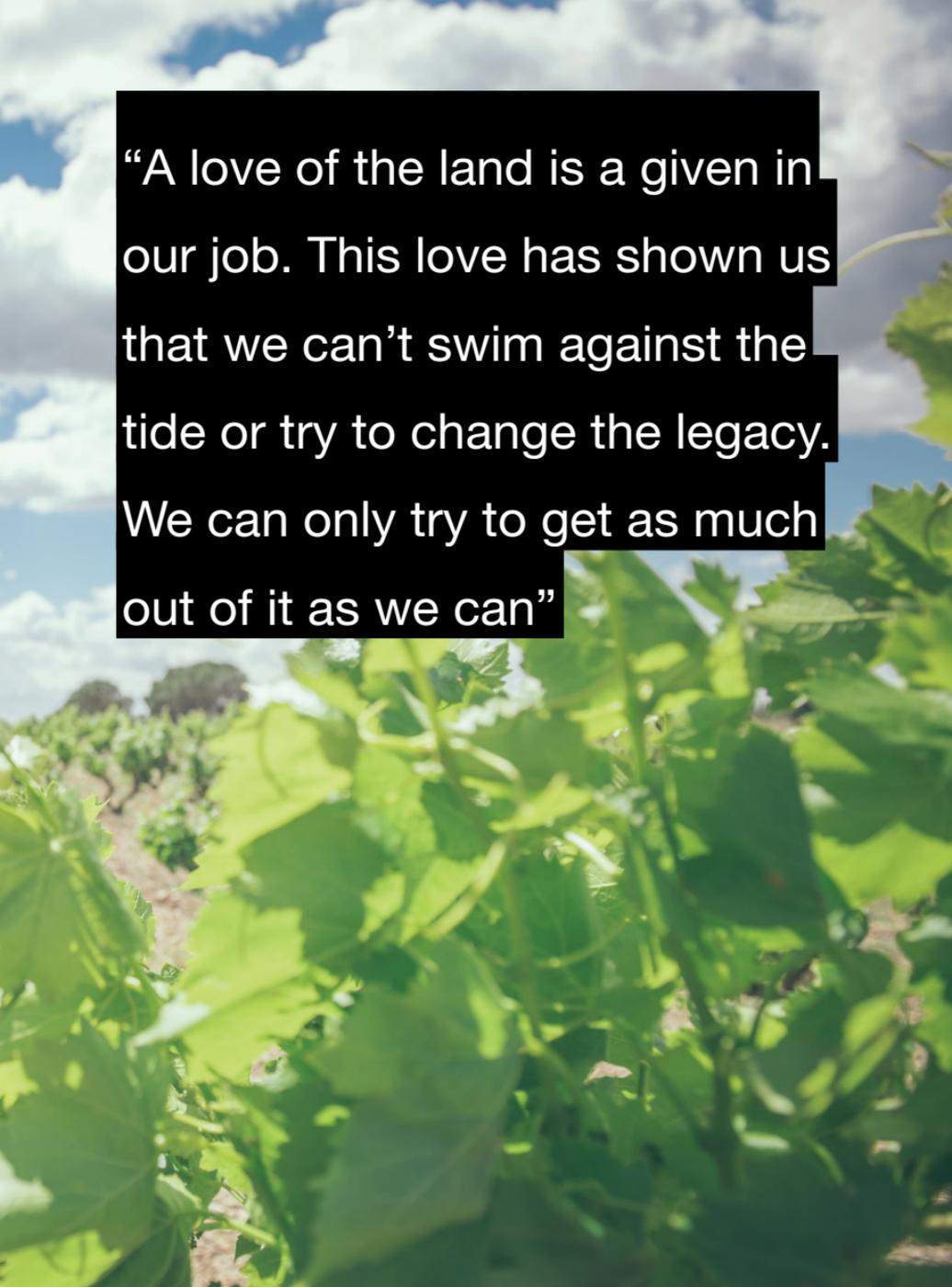


Anna is a woman of action not words: "Steve Jobs was important for what he did, not for what he said. You have to learn to enjoy what you do. You have to be more practical, more real."

She practises what she preaches every hour of the long days that she needs to put in if she is to continue with her visionary grandfather's project. Time passes but she knows how to make the most of it. She is warm and passionate, particularly when she is happy and taking risks among old Grey Grenache vines or on the sea shore. "Unthinking action, land and art," the essence of L'Empordà that she wants to transmit to her wines and which is the basis of Dalí's painting and Ferran Adrià's cooking. "It's not just a happy coincidence that two universal geniuses were born so close to each other," she says.



“A love of the land is a given in our job. This love has shown us that we can’t swim against the tide or try to change the legacy. We can only try to get as much out of it as we can”



Cap de Creus, Alt Empordà





Mum, do I have to work in the winery?

Lola is 13 years old, the eldest of Anna Espelt's three daughters, and not so long ago she put into words something that she had been thinking about for some time, probably because of things she had heard at school. "No, you don't. But you can if you want. It's your choice." "I'd like to be export manager," said Lola. "Well, in that case, you'll have to learn a lot of languages," replied Anna. Wine, an essential part of life, as the poet would say.

"My father always tells me that I made my first wine when I was eight and that the result was vinegar," says Anna. She was more precocious than her daughters but both generations have been immersed in the same world albeit at different times. "I first came into contact with wine – *cava* in fact – at my grandfather's house when I was very young. I went there at the weekend to turn the bottles and I still remember them being degorged," says Anna. She remembers the days she spent at the vineyard picking grapes and peaches.

Being born on Saint Ferriol's day marks you for life, whatever your thoughts are on religion and saints. Legend has it that Ferriol was an outlaw who used to spend the money he had robbed in the tavern with other drinkers and argue about who could stay upright longest when they were drunk. All this came to an end when he was convinced by Catholicism to give up thieving. According to legend, he was buried under a barrel of wine that from that day on was always full to the brim.

The Espelt Winery started out as a wedding present. "My grandfather, Lluís, was a tenant farmer and when he married my grandmother, Quimeta, their parents gave them a small vineyard," Anna explains with a touch of nostalgia. A founder member of the Pau Cooperative, her grandfather "had initiative and vision, he was innovative. There's no other explanation for why he decided to set up his own business when he was 69 years old," says his proud granddaughter, who is following in his footsteps. Between the two generations there is Anna's father, Damià Espelt, who works in the company selling products for farmers and their crops. "Espelt is our surname. All our ancestors worked with grapes and olives, the most common crops in the area between the mountains and the coast, which is where we are from," says Anna.

"Until the 1990s it was our grandfather who decided what the Espelts were going to do. But then we changed and now we take a different approach to winegrowing." From Mas Sattle, gazing over the expanse of L'Empordà, with the Mediterranean and the Pyrenees on either side and the Tramontane blowing unceasingly, Anna Espelt points to the first vines that her family worked and says, "My grandparents saw that they could use the Mediterranean

and the terraces to bring vines into this area. Recently I've been working on our family tree. Do you know what? We're all from Pau except for one or two from Palau. So we're not so bad considering, are we?"

An amphitheatre over the Mediterranean, sheltered by the Pyrenees and changing from season to season. In winter, the magical and silent surprise of the snow seldom arrives. In spring, the greens are tender and soft. In summer, everything is diffused with a soft, peach-coloured light. In September, the vineyards in L'Empordà are an elegant golden grey. [1]

Lluís and Quimeta had a certain reputation as winegrowers when they set up their winery in the year 2000. Damià, their son and Anna's father, helped them out and in that fundamental initial stage he took decisions that were to shape the company and the future of both his family and the wine they were producing. And Anna Espelt, who was longing to see the world after she had finished her degree in Oenology, had to go back home. She was in California doing some work experience in oenology when her grandfather fell ill and she had to return to L'Empordà after just six months. Since then she has been in charge of the winery, the first eight years managing viticulture and the next five years managing oenology. Now "she runs the winery with a firm hand" according to the winery's website. It should be added that she also runs it precisely and methodically. "Perhaps you'll see my grandmother, Quimeta, later because I've got to go and pick her up this afternoon" she warns while we walk along the embankment of Mas Sattle, next to the farmhouse in which she lives and

where winegrowers, importers, friends, acquaintances and wine lovers stay to enjoy a bit of wine tourism. A sculpture of a cypress tree and the moon welcome us at the top of the climb. It is the work of Josep Lluís Pascual, who also painted the portrait of Anna's grandfather that looks down on the entrance to the Espelt Winery.



The wine is made in the vineyard, between the wind and the sea

Anna and her team work with a total of 185 hectares of vines and a further 30 of olive trees. "At home we have samples of all the stages that Empordà winegrowing has gone through in the last 100 years," she explains in her personal desire to explore the possibilities of all areas of L'Empordà, however small they may be. After the phylloxera blight, 30,000 hectares of vines were reduced to 3,000, but Anna Espelt believes that some vines are still waiting to be discovered.

"What have we done here at Espelt? Well, we study the potential of each plot and decide on one course of action or another depending on what we find. You cannot ask the vineyard to give what it hasn't got. But the more potential it has, the less work you have to do," she explains as she drives from the winery to Mas Sattle. "If Mas Ventós weren't the farmhouse next door, you would think it was ours." The Tramontane is frightfully strong but Anna doesn't even seem to notice it. "It has a big impact on our vineyard. It helps to evaporate the humidity from the plant, and even though it rains, the climate is dry. But when the gusts are very strong, the shoots can break and the trellises have to be made specially so that they can stand up to it."



Perhaps because her sister is a linguist and journalist, Anna Espelt has always been aware that communication is fundamental if the end consumer is to hear about and understand what she is doing. “We do a lot of things and with time we have realised that not everything works. Although we were the first to make changes in our communication, design and marketing strategy, we are now reviewing everything and trying to set up a new communication plan.”



In the old generation I see quality;
in the new, I see quality

We created the brand image of the wines so that they would first catch your eye from the shelf and then reveal their innovation and creativity [...] As far as Espelt is concerned, the brand image communicates with consumers who are seeking quality in wine but also the complicity of other products. That is why we have broken away from the graphic tradition of the sector and we have sought inspiration in the impulsive character of the people of L'Empordà. [2]

“We started out on just the right foot. We spoke frankly and sincerely. Anna came to my studio with her father and said that they had a lot of vineyards, that for many years her father had sold many kilos of grapes to Perelada, that she had studied Oenology and that she had decided make wine,” explains the designer Xavier Mariscal. “I know people from Galicia, Bierzo and the Priorat and I have seen several family businesses and young people who are starting out in business. In the old generation I see quantity; in the new, I see quality. It’s good to see people like the Espelts because both Anna and her father are very down to earth” he says.

“Anna told me that she had decided to keep the old vines and had convinced her father that they should throw out half of the total harvest from each vine so that the expression of the grapes could improve. He says that she’s mad, that she doesn’t know what she’s doing. She’s got

organic vines and her father used to work with phosphates and chemicals. They seem to be opposites but the project is a good one. Anna is delightful, I'm in love with her. What you see is what you get," says the designer of Olympic mascot Cobi. He describes her virtues as a person and also as a wine professional. "She has known where she is going from the very beginning and she's expanded the business little by little. Although she did a degree, the day she left the faculty she realised that she knew nothing and that every day you can learn something new. She has worked on making good wine but also on communication and sales." Mariscal says that when she first came to his office she said that she had always admired his work and that it would be a dream to be able to work together. During our conversation, the designer exclaimed more than once "Anna's wonderful!"

He then goes on to talk about L'Empordà. "It's got real force. I'm fascinated by the vineyards in the Priorat. The landscape is really in your face. You can see that it's been shaped by man and monks. I am fascinated by the vineyards and the harshness of L'Empordà but the Priorat has the same force and wind."

After convincing the artist with the landscape and her business plans, Anna told him that they would be working on the whole of the Espelt range, all the family's wines. A total of 15 labels for wines that would have to be tried, tasted, understood and expressed. "My favourite is Quinze Roures, a white wine whose name, strength and image are very, very Mediterranean," reveals Mariscal. "And now we are taking a big step forward: we want to give each wine a value all of its own. Up to now they have been like little children between four and six years old. But now they have

grown up, they have their own personalities, they are much more defined, and we are going to use different typefaces to show this," he says. And underlying Mariscal's clearly identifiable style, there is humour, analysis and study. "Anna is very good. She is one of those clients who has clear ideas and that's great. She is really hard working, she has wonderful intuition. She's like a sister to me and whatever she does she does it with love and affection. We are delighted to be able to give her products an identity."

Despite the fact that Xavier Mariscal is involved in projects too numerous to mention, he is very happy to have taken the Espelts on. "I have been able to experience first-hand the progress that the winery is making. They are working old vineyards again, giving maximum respect to the production process and creating a team. What they are doing should be taught in the classroom as an example to follow."

Mariscal says that not many wineries understand the importance of communication and he looks to the past to make his point. "In the 1980s you had to explain its importance but in most cases it got you nowhere. If clients come to you they must know that communication is an investment that will give them good results. It's necessary and everybody does it but not very well. I tell my children that if they can't speak English, they'll be just like the people of my age who couldn't read or write. Even those who work the land have to be competent because they can learn from other producers, other countries and the advances made by science."

"As well as what we did with the wine *Quinze Roures*, I'm very happy with our work on a gift box, which is a touch ironic and has a gold engraving. On the labels there's



always a farmer, in the sun, and settings that are typical of L'Empordà. The artwork aims to reflect the authenticity of the project," Mariscal concludes.

The conversation does not end here and he brings up another winegrower who he gets on well with: Alfredo Arribas, who works in the Priorat. "He was looking to buy a small plot of land when he suddenly discovered wine so he started applying everything he knew about architecture and design to his newfound interest. He is a big believer in communication and, like Anna, he's quite prepared to pack his bags and take his wine to Germany or China. That's

why he's always got people from all over the world in his winery. In an exhibition in China, in the Spanish Pavilion, I thought that the best way to show that we are a country of wines was to use a map with photographs of wines and landscapes. This is the simplest way to show what sort of a country we are and the winegrowing heritage that we have. At present we are working to revitalise the Alforins region near Valencia and wine has a leading role in the project."

“Sol i Vent has strength but it is also soft and delicate. It is a declaration of principles, the wine which I identify most

“Drink wine with the people you get on with,” someone told her once. As we taste the wines that define her, in the tasting room of the Espelt Winery under the attentive gaze of the Roca brothers and Carme Rusalleda, she adds, “And if you love the people you're with, then it doesn't get any better.” People are one element of the so-called *wine five* of the sector, together with the wine, the decanting, the glass, the temperature and, of course, the people.

Espelt's repertory is extensive and Anna relates each wine to moments and people. She describes how she feels on her new website which divides the wines into various ranges:

Mediterrani (Mediterranean) / De terroir (Terroir wines) / Empordà surrealista (Surrealist Empordà) / Empordà de bon beure / Celebrar & Espelt / Castanyes i brunyols (Sweet dreams)

Anna Espelt speaks well and from the heart about all her wines. The Quinze Roures is the way to go, a complex, authentic wine full of freshness. "I wholeheartedly believe in moments. There is a moment for each wine. I attach great importance to what I eat and the choice must make sense," she says.

A white wine that is typical of L'Empordà. White Grenache and red Grenache. Old slate vineyards. Perfect for dishes that combine meat and fish.

Produced where unthinking action is possible. White Grenache and red Grenache. 5 moons in an oak barrel.

Complexity and drinkability. The good life. White Grenache Blanc and grey Grenache.

"Sauló, for example, is so versatile you can even drink it out of a plastic glass! I take it along whenever I go to a *calçotada* (spring-onion barbecue)! It's an amazing wine and has been awarded prizes at the Premis Vinari organized by Vadevi.cat. It's got many different layers; fruit and undergrowth, for example. It's hard to make."

They had that overflowing energy that you usually only find in the young. It's the innocence of someone who has not lived much but has lived intensely. It's the joy that you only find in those who live for the present and do not worry about the future. They raised their glasses every day to love, peace and festivals with a young wine that was as persistent and communicative as they were.

Sol i Vent is the produce of organic vineyards. It is very special to me because it is the wine I made for my final project at university and I made it just as I liked," she says smiling. "It is a team wine which I started from scratch. Under the supervision of my grandfather, Lluís, I gave it just the personality I like. This wine is a declaration of principles: it is strong but smooth and delicate at the same time. Made from red Grenache, Syrah and Monastrell, it is an authentic wine full of personality. It's the wine I probably identify most with."

She stopped and let the sandy soils of the vineyards run through her fingers while the sun and the Tramontane embraced her. She felt responsible for that magnificent legacy and she wanted to keep it alive by caring for the soil. She had been part of this world since she was a little girl and she had become passionate about it in her youth. There was no way back.

"Comabruna is the product of a single plot of land among the mountain vineyards in Rabós, where the soils are slate. It's the way we want to go. Terres Negres, on the other hand, is made from eight selected plots." We went to visit one of them with Anna and she expressed her surprise at the Grenache grapes that had been so much trouble but which, in the end, were giving her so much. The other element of the blend is Carignan, which Anna refers to in Catalan as 'carinyena' not 'samsó', the term that the linguistic authorities insist is the correct one. "Words are important and we have to defend the ones that were used by our parents and grandparents."

We were looking for old vineyards and we got lucky. We found a very old, wise one. One that had some hard-to-find Carignan vines very close to the ground, totally adapted to the Tramontane.”

On the labels on the back of the bottles there are haikus in Catalan, Spanish and English in which Anna, under the careful supervision of her sister Maria, describes the essence of the wine. “We do what we can,” she says.

Wines are like your children: you can't say which one you prefer. Anna is quite frank about this. “There are some wines I am more proud of, that's true. But it depends on the internal coherence of the wine with me and the initial expectations we had.” Now that white and rosé wine are becoming more popular, I ask her if, as some oenologists say, rosé is more difficult to produce. “It all depends on the work you do in the vineyard because the grapes have to be just ripe enough for acidity to be high,” says Anna. “Rosé wine is being drunk but the people who drink it don't talk about it. For the last five years, however, more and more is being bought, and in the USA, France and Holland it's been appreciated for much longer. We have to open up a bit. Rosé wines are much more versatile than we think and just because they are easy to drink or cheaper does not mean that they are any less good or that they are of questionable quality.”

Anna Espelt tries to avoid fashions and makes an appeal to common sense. She accepts that she increasingly likes “fresher wines. They help me in a lot of things and to produce them you have to have intuition and experience so that you can take the decision to harvest at just the right time.”

View of the Gulf of Roses, Empordà









In California the local varieties were a revelation but I didn't fully understand it until I got back to L'Empordà

Little did she think that carrying Berruga the giant in the festivals in Figueres would give her experience in teamwork and prepare her for the future. Likewise she remembers being a children's monitor and then moving on to manage the summer camps between 15 and 20 years old. And at that age she had no idea that her mother's mannerisms would also be hers for the rest of her life. It was clear that was an expressive leader from a very early age but she only became aware of it in her thirties. "I am very proud of what we have achieved and I think that now I am more mature I have begun to enjoy what each moment brings. I'm the sort of person who stops to think about what still has to be done, what is unfinished, new things, but I'm quite happy to face whatever new challenges I decide to set myself or that life throws at me. But I accept that I'm a little more impatient about the ones I set myself."

Anna Espelt studied Biology at the University of Barcelona and, being very particular about her food, she remembers having eggs for breakfast in Liverpool while she was on an Erasmus exchange. Even though she could have received a grant for a doctorate, when she finished her degree she decided to put biology to one side and devote her energies to the world she had discovered as a little girl.

She began the second-cycle course in Oenology at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili and thoroughly enjoyed the complete university experience, first in a hall of residence

and then in a rented flat on the Rambla Nova. She has not been back to Tarragona a great deal since but she has good memories, particularly of the friends she made. “We shared a flat with Cristina Nieto, who is now working as an oenologist in La Mancha, and Pep Aguilar and Patri Morillo, oenologists at Celler Comunica and consultants.” Of their domestic life she remembers the competitions to learn about household things and make a good lunch. And of their academic life she remembers how she had to juggle her work in the plant genetics laboratory in the mornings with lectures in the afternoon. After spending their university years together, Anna and Patri Morillo are still close. Patri has this to say about her: “When we were studying in Tarragona, she was always saying she wanted to go back to L’Empordà. She was very efficient when she studied. She was good at it and managed to learn without having to spend hours swotting. Even though her family had vines and her grandfather was setting up a new winery, she didn’t really know what the future held for her. She got involved slowly. She started by taking care of the viticultural side of things and gradually worked her way up to the management level, which I think is the right way to do things because she now has a real responsibility. I’ve always regarded her as capable and cautious and I think that the best is still to come. The expression of the Grenache is getting better and she is feeling ties to the *terroir*. Her room in our student flat was a chaos but she’s always had her thoughts in perfect order.”

For two years she attended lectures at the old Faculty of Oenology at the URV in Carrer Ramón y Cajal in Tarragona. She has pleasant memories of the architecture of the building, particularly the cloister, and she regards

the experimental farm Mas dels Frares as absolutely fundamental. “The farm is just amazing. It’s key to the learning process. You can’t understand what you’re learning without it. Also very important was the fact that the lecturers were also professionals from the sector.” Anna remembers visiting La Rioja while she was at university and when I ask her what most surprised her she said quite naturally, “Laurel Street!”

She particularly remembers the lecturer Josep Maria Pujol-Busquets. “He helped me a lot” she says, even though one day in class he said, “I don’t know why there are so many women here. You’re all going to end up in the laboratory or working in offices.” And she now sees that he was right. From her year, only two of the women are now working as oenologists in both the winery and the vineyard. “Fifteen years ago it was not easy for women to get on in the world of wine. Being able to work in the family business gave me a chance that other colleagues didn’t have,” she says.

“The best student when I was at university was a woman, Lourdes Jané,” says Josep Maria Pujol-Busquets, owner of Alta Alella and a lecturer at the URV for 10 years. The role of women in oenology has finally normalised and they can now do jobs for which they are prepared. They used to end up in the laboratory,” he says. “Now they work in the winery, go out to sell, get involved in management. It’s all quite normal now and more and more companies are being directed by women. When I was teaching I always said that of the top 10 students in any class, 7 or 8 were women, but ten years on it pained me to see that there were no first-rate women oenologists. It was a real shame that they didn’t have the same career opportunities

as a man," he says, proud of the change that his company and his family have undergone. "A woman has a greater capacity to take on responsibility than a man and their implication is greater. I don't know if it is the effect of them needing to show that they ask for no favours but we see it in Alta Alella. We have women heading a wide range of departments: exports, wine tourism, logistics and communication, among others. And we are undoubtedly better off for it. Women have incredible levels of implication and responsibility," he says. When I ask him about Anna Espelt, he speaks very well of someone who used to be a student of his and is now a colleague. "We now do the same job and we get on well. I was lucky enough to give classes in the final year of the Oenology degree when the students really get their heads down. They are not content just to get through the subjects because they are getting perilously close to show time," says Josep Maria. And he adds, "Anna was and is a very mature person. She knows how to listen and she appreciated the fact that her lecturer was a working professional, a contact that it was difficult to find once the degree was over. She was very much on the ball and she took heed when I told her to go to the USA for a time to learn English for once and for all and not to shut herself up in the family business immediately because she would have to take on an awful lot of responsibility."

Josep Maria Pujol-Busquets believes that cosmopolitanism is an important factor in Anna's current work. It has reinforced what she does and she has been able to handle it "because she is open minded, takes notice of what happens around her, listens and asks questions. That was what she was like even when she was a student and she gives the impression that she is a person who makes the most of her



time. She's capable of coming all the way to Barcelona from L'Empordà just to taste a wine and there aren't that many people who are prepared to do that, not that many who are so eager. She has an awful lot of responsibility. She's at the head of a sizeable business but she is more than capable and, above all, she has just the right attitude." Pujol-Busquets also heaps praise on her for her personal qualities: "She's charming, sweet, fun, clever and modern."

When Anna is asked whether the world of wine is male dominated, she responds, "Just like the rest of the world!" When she was 23 she started work in the viticulture section of the winery because her grandfather fell ill. It was by no means easy. "Just six months after finishing university I had to negotiate with 50-year-old men. They found it difficult to accept my role but I believe that you can show what you

are worth by working and you have to be able to apologise when necessary.” And that is how Anna showed what she was worth.

One day in the library at the URV, Anna wrote an email in English – supervised by a native student – applying for a work experience programme in Sonoma, California. She remembers she was trying on some clothes in a shop when her lecturer rang to tell her to make the application. She spent her first few days at the Belvedere Winery reviewing the press with two interns but she was soon put in charge of the barrels with other Mexican professionals. There she got a broader view of things “during a long, 4-to-5 month grape harvest” and she met two people with whom she is still friends and still has professional contact: Andrew Marks and Arthur O’Connor. They opened her eyes to the local varieties. “Thanks to them I understand how important they can be. Andrew explained it to me in 2004 and I’ve only just fully understood it, ten years later,” confesses Anna. And in the middle of this conversation Anna brings up the name of Agustí Vilarroya. “He is the person who has transformed the country’s viticulture. He lectures at the URV and Anna admires him for his humanity but she believes that Catalonia has a debt with him as a professional. “He deserves the country to give him some sort of recognition,” she says.

Anna has never stopped learning. Professional practice has involved being in touch with many other professionals from the world of wine but Anna has also had to act as team leader and it is in this respect that she has needed more training. After studying for an MBA she undertook the programme “Jo, Directiva” organised by the Catalan Government. “It was a mentoring course designed for women leaders and it provided us with tools

to communicate, to do business and to become a point of reference in the rural world. It's no coincidence that she still remembers how she got involved in the winery. "My father actually contracted me while we were still at the table after lunch. He said that the biggest challenge was to surround myself with the right people and that if I managed to do that they would teach me a lot." The Espelt Winery employs lots of women. They are there for their professional competence but Anna makes no attempt to conceal the fact that she likes this lack of equality. She's also very glad that she can rely on Marketing students from the University of Girona on work experience programmes to analyse the communicative weaknesses of the winery and turn them into opportunities. "I trust people, I am not demanding, trust helps me, I don't waste my energy and I do not need colleagues to only have certain skills; there also has to be personal feeling."

Just before the end of the interview, and almost as an aside, she mentions that she was awarded the prestigious Jaume Ciurana Prize for her final dissertation, which has now become a reality: Espelt's Sol i Vent. The jury chooses the winners on the basis of their academic record, their CV and a confidential report drawn up by the Faculty of Oenology, but the final dissertation – in this case an oenological project – also plays a role in the final decision. She does not flaunt the fact that she was awarded the prize, perhaps because she was quite happy to have earned the respect of her fellow students and her immediate university circle. Jaume Ciurana was the oenologist who first directed the Catalan Institute of the Vine and Wine (INCAVI) and he also played a leading role in raising awareness about the wines produced in Catalonia. The 2015 edition was the fifteenth.

HANDS

“With both hands / raised to the moon /
we open a window / in the closed sky”

“We shall fight for the night / and the word
woman. / Only then will grow the tree /
of liberation”

Maria Mercè Marçal

What do your hands say about you?

I've always thought that my fingers are like a little girl's. This aside, I think they show that I do things, that I am in contact with the vine.

What about the hands of other oenologists?

They change colour during the harvest.

And the hands of a sommelier?

Generally speaking they are elegant and delicate, because contact with grapes, vines and barrels has little to do with contact with glasses.

Teachers?

I expect their hands will reflect what they teach. They must be coherent.

And wine critics?

I imagine them being stained with red wine after a long tasting.



WINE AND LIFE'S WORK



We want to do real things that can be understood

For me, Espelt is my life's work. It is the way in which I connect with my roots, live in cycles and care for a part of my land. I love being able to do a job that gives people pleasure and enables me to take a little of L'Empordà to other parts of the world. We are constantly working to improve our wines, to give them character and to make them reflect the place they are from. Mediterranean wines that do not lose their freshness and which tempt us to have a second glass. [3]

"I don't have a standard day but I always start early." On the day we arranged to meet in Vilajuïga she arrived at the winery at 6.15 so that she could get some work done before setting off for the vineyards for the rest of the morning. She normally arrives at 8. "I spend some time in the vineyard, tasting by myself or with Xavi Martínez, an oenologist, and then I settle down to management and marketing. I am quite involved in the viticultural side of things but it is Ester Pérez who is in charge of the vines and I set the oenological styles," she says, proud that her team are all rowing in the same direction.

"We want to do real things that can be understood. It's like a nice dress: it has to be well cut if it is to make you look good," she says by way of explaining her objectives. "We produce wines that are complex and drinkable. If you want to share a glass of wine with your partner on a Wednesday evening, well, all you have to do is uncork the bottle. There's no need to wait for a special occasion.

Anna remembers that in the year 2000 when she was in California on her work experience programme she didn't like a lot of the wine she tasted because there was too much wood, which masked the expression of the *terroir*.

"The work we do at Espelt is based on three fundamental pillars: we try to find interesting soils with special microclimates further up in the mountains, in old vineyards and in special natural areas such as Mas Marés; we use local varieties and we explore organic viticulture. Just at the moment we have 80 hectares and every year we will be adding more." These are the foundations on which Espelt is based and the best way to understand them is to take a stroll through the vineyard. The mixed vines of *lledoner roig* (grey Grenache) and Carignan are vinified plot by plot. There are a total of 26 of which only 9 are chosen to make the wine, a practice that was initiated five years ago. Thorough, slow and surprising in the mouth. "Making a wine that is easy to understand is not necessarily a bad thing. We need to stop contemplating our navel!" says Anna, convinced that she has to fight against elitism in the wine industry. "We cannot forget our roots, our ancestors can guide us. I have learned a lot from Josep, the owner of this vineyard, where there is a mixture of 85-year-old vines, because he is always positive and full of life." And she adds that it was Josep who taught her that not all old vines are good. "There are old, wise vines, and vines that are just old, in the same way that some people are old and wise while others are just old. Josep was old and wise. The importance of the plant is not its age, but the soil, its orientation, the variety and many other factors." The map of the Espelt vineyard is perfectly illustrated on the new website:

RABÓS. Old vines, very old vines, between 30 and 114 years old. Carignan with small amounts of *Lledoner* (Grenache) concealed among them. Wise and old vineyards, planted on slate. Extremely low yields that lead to power and complexity. We sought out vineyards that could tell us about who we are and who we were... And we found some gems.”

MAS MARÉS. Green vineyards by the sea, in the Cap de Creus Nature Reserve. The organic vines are part of a project that goes beyond viticulture. We attempt to create a mosaic in which the vines are intermingled with oak trees, pastures and plains thus producing a more mature ecosystem with greater biodiversity. Granite, the Tramontane and the sea breeze are the perfect backdrop for very Mediterranean wines: complex, intense and delicate.

MOUNTAIN. Our mountain vineyards encircle the winery in a granite enclave. They were planted between 1998 and 2002 and a good number were the subject of Anna’s dissertation. We decided to go up into the mountains again to rediscover L’Empordà’s true *terroir*. There are 25 hectares of organically-grown red varieties, mostly Mediterranean. It was also our first experience of reconstructing terraces, an essential skill to have if we are to prevent erosion by the torrential rains that are such a feature of our climate.

PLAIN. These vineyards are just in front of the winery. There is *Lledoner Blanc* and *Negre* (white and black Grenache), Macabeu and other grapes we use for our younger wines. They are the origin of the winery. They are our point of departure and have taught us everything we know.

Rediscovering the *lledoner roig* grape has probably been one of Anna's most important tasks in recent times. She was the driving force behind the project and recognises that it has not been easy. "I have found it very difficult to understand the plant. Here in L'Empordà the *lledoner roig* was traditionally used for sweet Grenache, but we wanted to make a white wine first, the Quinze Roures. It's a variety from L'Empordà with a long history and also plenty of personality. The vines are not particularly beautiful but they are where it's at and they put the work in," she says.

"*Lledoner roig*, red Grenache and gray Grenache are all terms that can be used to refer to the same grape. It's exotic. It's not white or black. It's pink. It's hard to find a vineyard that contains only this variety because it is often mixed in with others. It's more vigorous than Carignan, which it is often found with, and it is extremely resistant to the Tramontane and drought," says Anna, who knows full well that "results are best when it ripens well. This usually happens in poor soils. You should also use the typical vines of L'Empordà, not the vines that came from France," she concludes.

When I ask her if the best way to express the *terroir* is to make varietal wines as some oenologists claim, she is quick to reply. "We make varietal wines if we know that things are going to work out well but it's not essential. We are not obsessed with making varietal wines. We are quite content with our blends and we are getting good results."

I ask her whether wines reflect gender and her response is clear. "A wine's personality comes from the oenologist, so femininity is clearly reflected but it is not the deciding factor." Having discussed the human factor, varieties and climate, she moves on to the soil: "I like how they do it in

Burgundy: they work the land in plots. I'm very interested in the roots of the plants but also the personal, family and social roots of the people who work with us."

"The Espelt Winery took a big step forward when we decided to professionalize our communication strategy. We even took on a director, Xavier Crespo, because it was clear that we had to communicate," says Anna. They had this vision, or this ability to see the future, in exports as well as in communication. And they are getting results now. "My father had great vision and he realised that we would have to sell to the world. In 2003 we hired an export manager before a secretary. We realised that we wouldn't sell a great deal in Madrid and we decided to opt for the international market. At first our market was a local one but now we're selling to about 20 countries around the world, including the USA, Japan and Canada. And we're just starting to break into the Chinese market although we still have a lot of work to do."

But Espelt is looking inward to the country as well as outward. In an article posted on the Espelt blog, Anna speaks of "rebirth in L'Empordà or the post-adolescence of wine" when describing a lecture-cum-tasting that she organised a few months ago commissioned by Monvínic, the most international of our wine bars. It was an initiative that enabled her to enter wineries in L'Empordà that she had never visited before and make an assessment of the prevailing status quo.

"L'Empordà is like a giant picture postcard, envied by many and a cause of pride for many others," the text begins. And it ends with Dalí's paraphrase, "The only way of reaching the universal is through the ultra-local." "This is the way to go if we want quality. We should look to the



world of cooking as our model because, from very close at hand, it's shown us that excellence is possible." She goes back to the Greek and Roman past of L'Empordà, discusses the emergence of cooperatives in the 20th century, and then culminates with what she refers to as "the reconquest of the Empordà *terroir*":

The resurgence of the quality of Empordà wine can be traced back to the end of the 1990s when some winegrowers started to look for ways of improving the wines produced with grapes from the plain, even though this qualitative step led to a colonization of foreign varieties, which were not always planted in the most suitable places. Over the years, and thanks to exportation and people like Didier de

Mas Estela, we have learned to reappraise the local varieties, good *terroirs* and organic viticulture or, at least, be respectful of the territory. This is, in fact, the direction that most wineries in the area have been going in over the last few years, although they are all taking their own time. And it is a change that we firmly believe in.

A whole new generation of oenologists are reinterpreting the winegrowing history of L'Empordà. The way ahead is clear, they have been provided with training and experience by their families, and they have the Catalan qualities of *seny* and *rauxa* (common sense and hot-headedness). The book *Encara no sé com sóc* by Maria Àngels Vayreda set the tone for Anna Espelt's lecture at Monvínic in which she described innovative and singular projects, local varieties planted in different types of soil and wines that are more reductive than oxidative. If you would like to try the wines that were tasted that day, Anna chose the following: Martí Faixó Perafita Picapoll 2013, La Vinyeta Carinyena blanca Microvi 2013, Cellers Mas d'en Guilla rosat Vinya del Metge, Espelt Lledoner roig 2013, Clos d'Agon 2008, Castell Perelada Aires de Garbet 2012, Can Sais Selecció 2011, Martí Fabra Masia Carreres 2010, Espelt Comabruna 2011, Vinya d'Olivardots Samsó Pissarra 2009, Cooperativa d'Espolla Empordà Dolç - Garnatxa Solera and Mas Estela Dolç Just.

We've been wanting to share for some time now. Share L'Empordà and its líquid landscapes like the Tramontane, Carignan, Grenache, Albera, the Cap de Creus, the terraces, the slate and the granite soils.

Share everything that we try to put in the bottles. And also share the part of L'Empordà that cannot be drunk, what we are and everything around us, the nooks and crannies that make us think and make life what it is.

"My favourite season? I like them all! But perhaps I would say spring because everything comes into flower, it's resplendent and you feel like going out into the country. And between August and October I have no time for anything because of the grape harvest," says Anna.



I thought that Didier was exaggerating but what he told us years ago is the most sensible way to make wine in the Cap de Creus

Another person who has influenced Anna Espelt is Didier Soto, an oenologist at the Mas Estela Winery. "I met her grandfather and he really did have wine in his blood. I didn't have the same relationship with her father but he put Anna on the right track. She's as sharp as a tack!" he says. Then he adds, "She's a first-rate biologist who was not at all sure about oenology at first but has finally discovered its meaning."

Didier Soto is a leading expert in biodynamic viticulture in Catalonia and abroad. He says that "15 or 20 years ago, the country was not in a position to understand the spirit of wine." "All products of the ground come under the domain of biodynamics," he says with conviction. "Twenty

years ago nobody knew anything about this. Anybody can make wine, but not anybody can make authentic wine. You have to respect the place where it is made. You have to understand the tradition, the rules and the territory.” Anna and Didier eat together almost every week and Didier soon spotted her “intelligence and sensitivity”. “She is very receptive to new cultural practices and the spirit of wine,” he says, a direct reference to his own philosophy. They have known each other for a decade now and, although Anna had no intention of doing so, Didier Soto accepts that “she has made him see wine in a different light.” Didier understands that Anna has enormous responsibility at Espelt and that he cannot take his work lightly because at the end of the month there are a lot of salaries to pay. But even so he has found room to freely express his new winemaking concerns. “In Roses, she has started to work on a vineyard that has been in the family for ages. It’s going to be organic so it’s a bit experimental, but it’s a serious project that is heading in the direction of a fully-fledged biodynamic approach. Like Anna, Mas Marés is going to evolve. It won’t be quick and it won’t be the only project. There’s a long way to go and it can only be done by people with a bit of the rebel in them.”

“Biodynamics is something that is a part of you. You have to want nature to express itself in harmony: the insects, the animals, all the agents in the vineyard have to live in harmony and the actual plant becomes secondary, just another element. In my opinion I think it’s the only approach if things are to be genuine, if the product is to reflect the land. The wine that is a product of this philosophy cannot be copied,” argues Didier Soto. In his defence of



biodynamic winemaking he states that “very soon wine is going to be culture or not.” He is convinced that Anna will manage to produce a wine that tastes of the vineyards of Mas Marés. He insists that the process of change is never immediate but he knows that “you have to believe and be thoroughly convinced if you want to get to where you want to go.” No two years are the same, no two wines are alike. It’s not easy to understand, I know, but that is how things are. You have to understand nature and respect it.”





esprit
every



WINE AND CULTURE

https://youtu.be/7vEZHMxoc_U

"I had two options today: cook for you or take you to the Compartir restaurant in Cadaqués," says Anna at the wheel of her car as she drives us to the restaurant. She decided on the second option for very good reasons. "That's what I want to do when I grow up: follow the Compartir model, be easy going in the world of wine, make top quality-wines that can be complex and difficult but which have a history that you can trace back. But if you are not interested in any of that, all you have to do is enjoy them."

"Why do I think L'Empordà is magic? For the simple reason that this real, tangible and attractive land, as if by magic, seems to contain all the expressions, contrasts and wonders of a robust nature that can just as easily open out into fertile, productive plains as it can look out over the sea or climb up into the mountains and wander through passes in small valleys that still bear the signs of primitive man. There are menhirs and dolmens in many of the nooks and crannies of Alberes or on the top of the hills and ridges that surround Roses." Montserrat Vayreda, *L'Empordà Màgic, l'Alt Empordà*, 1988.

The hotheadedness of those who live in L'Empordà is reflected in art and cuisine. Its maximum exponents are Salvador Dalí – if she were able to speak to the spirits Anna confesses that she would have asked him to design the labels for her wines – and Ferran Adrià. Also the Roca brothers, winners of the best restaurant award in 2013 and 2015 given by the English journal *Restaurant Magazine*. Anna respects the chefs from L'Empordà but also all those who are at the forefront of world gastronomy. In the tasting room there are small pictures of Fermí Puig, Sergi Arola,

Carme Rusalleda, the Roca brothers and Ferran Adrià. “From their villages, from their grass roots, they have achieved excellence, and that is why they are on display in our tasting room. Their gaze obliges us to rise to the challenge,” says Anna Espelt. They have all come to the winery to give lectures on gastronomy in which wine plays a major role as part of the pyramid of the Mediterranean diet, given world heritage status by UNESCO. The Espelt Winery is revitalizing the culture of L’Empordà through its capacity to attract the best chefs, organize wine epigram competitions and lead the way in the visual arts. “Not so long ago we were having to go out and search for artists. Now they are coming to us. At the moment we are involved in the project “Vinya Lluerna” led by the artist from Figueres Jordi Mitjà. It consists of collecting rocks and stones from the vineyard, cleaning them up and painting them with luminous traces. Once the paint has dried, various coloured shapes are drawn on them and then they are stuck onto the trellises with silicone. By day they are painted stones; by night, in the moonlight, they are glow-worms,” says Anna. Inside the winery, on the other hand, there are works by art students which are replaced during the year.

It is no coincidence that nearby, in Roses, the Wine Family Museum has been set up, a private initiative designed to show people how to experience and understand wine, and which ends up with a tasting of the wines from Coll de Roses. Anna Espelt’s three wines “are a faithful reflection of the majestic character of the magnificent manor house, which has watched over these vines for centuries, and the mild Mediterranean climate,” claims the website.

Coll de Roses provides an audio-visual tour that takes visitors on a sensory journey to learn about the wine production process. Both beautiful and poetic, it provides accurate, in-depth information. By walking through the various rooms, and using their five senses, visitors discover how wine is produced, starting off with grapes growing in the vineyard, being pressed, fermented and later aged in barrels, before finally ending up on our table as wine. At the end of the tour, visitors will see the farmhouse's former oil press and learn about the importance of olive trees and olive oil in this area. Finally, they can taste a selection of the wines produced at Coll de Roses. [4]

The Coll de Roses, a magnificent backdrop, rises behind Mas Coll, an estate where wine has been produced for centuries. As many as 13 generations of the family have cultivated vines, olive trees and wheat in the same location.

But if there is one place with magic, that is Cap de Creus and the vineyards of Mas Marés. This is where Anna restlessly awaits her future.

The geology of Cap de Creus is special, it has been studied in depth and it is portrayed in Dalí's paintings and those of many of the artists he inspired. [5]

L'Empordà contains some really wonderful places. Landscapes that make perfect paintings, the inspiration of poets, writers and painters. The Cap de Creus is the best example.



Ecological viticulture, the Mediterranean Sea and the Tramontane are our distinguishing features. We are people with a strong tenacious spirit. We believe in the soil and we respect it. We tend mountain vineyards, where our ancestors planted and built terraces. We know that Grenache is the grape variety that is best suited to the Tramontane wind, just as we are. [6]

Espelt's estate of Mas Marés, the Mas Estela Winery and Martín Faixó's Mas Sa Perafita all operate within the nature reserve and the three wine producers have joined forces to form an association that aims to inform people about "the landscape and the biodiversity of the land where we live, tend our vines and make wine. We also want to tell people about the wines we make and different ways of discovering Cap de Creus, for example, from land to sea instead of from sea to land."

The association is known as Ceps del Cap de Creus (Vines from Cap de Creus) and it is clear to the three members that they have to show that “the crops in the nature reserve have not only been there for hundreds of years, they are also a source of riches for the ecosystems and that adopting organic ways of working that respect the land will have a positive impact on the evolution of the ecosystems and landscapes and the prevention of fires, which have done so much damage to the area.” With the support of the nature reserve authorities, who are fully behind the initiative, winegrowing has become much more respectful of this green area that overlooks the Mediterranean and is caressed by the cooling sea breeze.

“The wines are made from mountain vineyards – the ones Anna has brought back to life for her present and future projects – where the soils are fundamental to the quality. Shallow granite or slate soils, with such pronounced slopes that our ancestors were obliged to construct terraces in order to be able to farm,” they explain. “They are mountain and sea wines. The Mediterranean gives the vines strength and character because they are used to the Tramontane and the sea breeze. The wind and the salt give the wine a fresher, more complex character, and make the vines stubborn and resistant, just like the viticulturists who tend them. Grenache, and other Mediterranean varieties adapt perfectly to these conditions,” they say.

The members of Ceps del Cap de Creus introduced organic viticulture gradually and naturally and the fact that the vines are in a nature reserve has helped convince people that the soil that has been handed down through the ages must be improved before it is handed on to future generations. In fact, Mas Estela is a leading world authority

on biodynamic agriculture. In everybody's interest, the idea is to develop sustainable wine tourism that is friendly to the natural landscape.

For this reason, the Espelt, Mas Estela and Martín Faixó estates organize joint tours. The association offers tastings of wines from the three estates in different types of tour: tours with or without a guide, tours led by one of the three owners, tours that provide visitors with an overnight stay at Mas Estela or Sa Perafita de Martin Faixó. "There have been vines in the nature reserve for hundreds of years. The terraces that are such a feature of the landscape bear witness to this. Vines improve the ecosystem and in combination with other crops (cork, pasture, plains, olives) they can also improve the biodiversity. But if the Cap de Creus ecosystems are to improve, steps must be taken to solve the area's main problem: fires. And vines are the best system of fire prevention," all three winemakers are quick to point out.

* * *

"I still remember coming to the Cap de Creus with my parents in a small boat. They would take us to two really out-of-the-way spots. Once we had left the boat, we would have to walk for quite a while and when we got there we would spend the day, have lunch, with salt coating our skin." Anna gets quite emotional when she speaks about the Cap de Creus and her dreams of filling it with vineyards. On slate soils, with a microclimate that is on level 3 of the Winkler scale – at Vilajuïga it is on level 4 – and greater complexity than in other areas of L'Empordà, she is undertaking an organic project that is her future. "The vineyards guarantee the reserve's biodiversity. We are working together with Mas Estela and Martin Faixó.

Didier has been in favour of local varieties and an organic approach for a long time now but I used to think that this was a touch extravagant. But now I think that it's the most sensible way of making wine in this area." For Anna Espelt, the Cap de Creus lies at the very heart of her project. "What is most important is that the wine is good," she sums up when I ask her if biodynamics is the right road to go down. "In biodynamics there are 28-day cycles just as there are in viticulture, the phases of the moon and other areas of life. It's just common sense to me, but quality has to take precedence over everything else," she says. Cap de Creus is a patchwork of landscapes that looks out over the sea and where cows leisurely graze. The aroma of thyme is all-pervading, stronger than anywhere else in L'Empordà. Anna picks a sprig, holds it to her nose and loses herself in the Mediterranean aroma. She sits by the side of the footpath, closes her eyes and listens to the silence. Or her heart. Which beats at Mas Marés. "The thyme here is lighter, more delicate, more complex, more intense," she says after a few seconds' silence. And all of this will subsequently become part of the wine. Espelt has 25 hectares of vineyard in the Cap de Creus, 25 reasons to get emotional. The views are like picture postcards and Anna is enthralled by the landscape she is so familiar with. "You can hear everything, you can feel it. I don't want to sound heroic but when I'm here I don't feel that I am working. There is magic, calm, peace," she says, trying to keep her emotions in check.

For her, "it is more important to do things than talk about them." Espelt is a project that must be communicated – which they do as enthusiastically as possible – but the most important thing is to satisfy those who drink the wine. And she wants it to be absolutely clear that "We try to plant the crops that are right for each place. Every part of the



winery must have a strategy and a person in charge. We are trying to connect with the new generations because they are the future, and our enjoyment depends on theirs. We respect them and we want to do away with all prejudices.”



When I create a wine, I want it to have hidden qualities, to be a gift in a bottle. But if someone cannot appreciate these hidden qualities but enjoys the wine just the same, that's great

“What we want to do with wine tourism is for the tourists to be a little happier. If we can get them to enjoy themselves, if they can take the landscape – the authenticity – away with them in a glass, then we will have done all we ever wanted to do. We believe in the ‘visited winery’ syndrome. I am very excited by the visitors seeing what we do because when they drink the wine they will enjoy it even more. My favourite season? I like them all! But perhaps I would say spring because everything comes into flower, it’s resplendent and you feel like going out into the country. But between August and October I have no time for anything because of the grape harvest,” says Anna.

Anna is convinced that Espelt’s priority should be to throw wide the doors to the winery, allow all visitors to the winery to enjoy the wine, and invite them to taste the product without making any attempts to teach them because “it is not fair to make value judgements.” Salvador Dalí wrote that “The true artist is one who is able to paint extraordinary scenes in the middle of an empty desert. A true painter is one who is able to patiently paint a pear surrounded by the tumult of history.” I think that Anna is capable of making great wines and struggling to ensure that elitism does not destroy the essentials: wine, food, enjoyment.

* * *

“I have learned to live in phases that last for 28 days and use them so that they help me in my daily life,” she confesses. She says that she reads Miranda Grey and she particularly recommends *Red Moon*. “Women are like the Moon, we

change gradually from day to day. You never see the whole of the cycle; you can only ever see one phase.”

Gray is a writer and spiritual teacher. Her texts have helped Anna Espelt to understand life as a woman and to acquire greater patience:

When we match a task to the enhanced skills we experience in a phase, not only we can do things better and quicker - we also feel great! Our menstrual cycle is an amazing instrument for creating achievement and happiness. [7]

She also recommends *Women Who Run with the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola, a psychoanalyst, if you want to understand yourself and be able to swim against the tide. It teaches you that “if you don’t ask, things won’t happen by themselves” and for this reason she has always been determined and proactive. “When you find someone like that, you have to look after them,” she says. She learned this lesson just recently, in her thirties, by observing her nine-year-old daughter. Last Christmas she had invited her parents, aunts and uncles for lunch. Anna and Víctor made the meal and selected the wines, and spent all morning in the kitchen. Her sister-in-law rang to ask if she needed anything. Anna said she didn’t. Her daughter thought she did. Without saying anything to anyone, she rang back and told her to bring a centrepiece for the table.

An aerial photograph of a valley. A dirt road winds through green fields and hills. In the background, there are mountains and a body of water under a sky with large, white and grey clouds.

PERSONAL JOURNIES





The *lledoner roig* grape is wild but it has a touch of civilization and it is versatile. It shows that our land is a crossroads

She feels quite at home in the winery, and even more so if she meets up with colleagues, who, like herself, have risen to the challenge of using the *lledoner roig* grape. “Getting together with them is very enriching.” Anna feels a fatal attraction for this variety, which they have been working with at the Espelt Winery for years “in the belief that it could define the Empordà white wine. White wine with *lledoner roig* because it is wild and has a touch of civilization. It shows that our land is a crossroads. It is a versatile wine,” she says.

Wine regions

When asked about regions that inspire her because of how they understand wine, Burgundy in France and the Yarra Valley in Australia are the first names to spring to her lips. In Burgundy “they take great care of viticulture and all the details, and work with great precision in the vineyard,” she explains. And in Australia “the people have no prejudices and are much more knowledgeable than we give them credit for here.” Talking of France and Australia, she mentions her passion for Côtes du Rhône. “Just at the moment I’m seeking inspiration from this other French region. It’s Mediterranean like we are and I’m particularly

interested in the Croze-Hermitage area because they make Mediterranean wines and we have to be able to understand it and put it into practice," she explains.

She often has to travel but the business side of things takes up all of her time. Every now and again, however, she goes on a trip to find out about winemaking projects. And when she takes a break she tries to spend as much time as she can with her family. She says, "Visiting wineries is not high on the list of my daughters' priorities." She adds that she was in California a short while ago and she had the chance to visit one or two but she never had as much time as she would have liked

Gastronomic route

She has special memories of El Motel in Figueres. "It's where I learned to eat and they do the best sorbet of thyme flowers and mint that I've ever tasted." She hasn't a bad word to say about the place which is a delight for all lovers of good cuisine. She also unconditionally recommends El Mirador de l'Almadraba in Roses. "It's the best terrace I know by a long chalk. I learned a lot about eating there and when we have to decide what to harvest, that is where we do it. After we take a look at the vines, instead of locking ourselves up in the winery, in the laboratory, we go for a bite to eat at the Almadrava and take our decision."

To recommend Cal Campaner in Roses, she says "All they do is grilled fish. But what delicious fish it is!" She reminds us that her aim is to become like the Compartir restaurant in Cadaqués, but in the form of a winery. And she is also enthusiastic about El Far de Cap de Creus (the Cap de Creus Lighthouse). "The place just says all there is to say," she says.

Anna Espelt's wine bars

Girona

Raspa-bar. This is the terrace of the Almadrava restaurant in Roses. It has a fantastic selection of wines and the views are unbeatable.

<https://vimeo.com/49643973>

Plaça del Vi, 7. Although it doesn't stock our wine because the menu includes biodynamic and natural wines, it's a nice place with good food.

<https://www.facebook.com/placadelvi7?fref=ts>

Espelt Viticultors

www.espeltviticultors.com
www.facebook.com/espelt.viticultors
www.twitter.com/CellerEspelt
www.instagram.com/cellerespelt/

17493 Vilajuïga (Girona)

972 531 727

Vins de Roses i Wine Family Museum

www.vinscollderoses.com

17480 Carretera de les Arenes, s/n, Roses (Girona)

972 256 465



WHAT PEOPLE THINK



Cèsar Canovas, *sommelier* at Monvínic

“We chose Anna to organize an Empordà tasting at Monvínic because she is representative of what is happening in the region. As well as being a scientifically knowledgeable oenologist, she loves the land and her roots, she uses local varieties, she researches and she respects the region.

Despite everything she is a simple person, very approachable, as are Salvador from the Còsmic Celler and Jaume Serra. They get the pot boiling with their vision and sensitivity. The other day I tasted her *lledoner* and found it to be truer. She does things because she understands them and she lets the wines express themselves. She uses her experience to test what happens every year and she analyses where she has to go. She acquires knowledge through sensitivity.”

Ferran Centelles, *sommelier* and ambassador for Jancis Robinson

“She is an impressive oenologist. She is a mix of many positive factors: she knows how to listen, she knows how to delegate and her courage and curiosity have considerably improved the quality and authenticity of her wines in the last ten years. She is enthusiastic and convinced about everything she does but even so she doesn’t keep anything back for herself. She shares concerns, impressions

and feelings with her team, full of great people and professionals. She is a model of what a positive attitude and an optimistic approach can do at work. She is the mainstay, without which the project would fail.”

Josep Pitu Roca, *sommelier* at El Celler de Can Roca

“Anna is a genuine Empordà woman. She lives outside the comfort zone and she has been able to revitalize a region, is brave enough to take on an adventure and can make dreams come true. I will never forget a talk she gave about her grandfather at her winery. She said, “My grandfather was well loved. A lot of people came to his funeral.” She was a grateful and nostalgic granddaughter, she felt a sense of loss for the person who may well have aroused her interest in wine. She may be making wine now thanks to him. Whatever the case may be, between Vilajuïga and Cala Montjoi, she has shown talent, ability, sensitivity and capacity to write the best chapter in the history of Empordà wine.

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] www.espeltvicultors.com

[2] <http://www.mariscal.com/es/proyectos/109/espelt#sthash.Qnh1J1wN.dpuf>

[3] www.espeltvicultors.com

[4] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x3eMzkUO2UQ>

[5] <http://www.cepsdecapdecreus.org/>

[6] <http://www.cepsdecapdecreus.org/ca/inici#vicultura-i-vins>

[7] <http://www.mirandagray.co.uk/>

Publicacions URV

1st edition: March 2016

Legal deposit: T 506-2016

ISBN: 978-84-8424-442-4

PUBLICACIONS DE LA UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

Av. Catalunya, 35 - 43002 Tarragona

Tel. 977 558 474

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DO Empordà

ANNA ESPELT

Josep Pitu Roca [sommelier]:

“ Whatever the case may be, between Vilajuïga and Cala Montjoi, she has shown talent, ability, sensitivity and capacity to write the best chapter in the history of Empordà wine



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