

# Telmo Rodriguez, Bio Dynamic Winemaker, L'Enfant Terrible of Spanish Wine

**B**io Dynamic is the latest trend in winemaking, but what is it you may ask? It is an approach to grape-growing that embraces the idea of ever-increasing ecological self-sufficiency just as with modern agro-ecology, but includes ethical-spiritual considerations. This type of viticulture views the farm as a cohesive, interconnected living system. Practitioners claim that it improves the health of their vineyard in terms of biodiversity, soil fertility, crop nutrition, and pest, weed, and disease management.

To get a practical take on Bio Dynamic Wines I met with Telmo Rodriguez at his fabulous bio dynamic wine tasting held recently at TASTE Restaurant at Westin Grande Sukhumvit. He is one of Spain's most celebrated winemakers who is a true pioneer; an advocate of the use of native grape varieties tied to the climate of their sites making world class, bio dynamically produced wines from both the undiscovered as well as the better known wine regions of Spain.

In addition to being one of Spain's biggest winemakers, Telmo is a keen supporter of the Return to Terroir movement, and is adamant about respecting nature which is why all of his wines are biodynamic. Out of respect for Spanish tradition he plants old style bush vines rather than world wide popular trellising which for him aren't interesting and destroy the landscape. Equally important to Telmo is the revival of indigenous Spanish grapes; he is very outspoken



against the colonization of international grapes in Spain. All of this in addition to small size wineries that emphasize on the human element in winemaking which allows Telmo not just to make good organic wines, but real wines with real tastes, wines that are easy to drink, honest and good value for money.

"I am terroir driven and with all of my vineyards," he says, "I like to make three levels of wine for a specific purpose. The entry level wine is a picture of the landscape where the grapes are grown; the mid level wines look at the roots of where it's coming from and; my top level wines are made with grapes from exceptionally old vines from the most prestigious vineyards."

The first wine he poured was 2008 "g" Dehesa Gago Toro, made with

grapes from his Toro Estate that is named after a Spanish breed of bull that is both elegant and powerful. The 19th century lower-case "g" typeface that appears on all the Toro wines is transformed, and modernized, by a bull horn. He was a major force in elevating Toro to one of the most in vogue wine regions of Spain. The distinctive red soils produce a Tinto de Toro (the local clone of Tempranillo) with tremendous fruit concentration, ripeness, acidity, tannins and structure. Aged in stainless steel tanks, in the glass the wine has a dark crimson colour with an expressive nose of spicy black fruits, Asian spices, incense and violets and in the mouth it's ripe and tasty while showing a balance seldom seen in the region.

To compare the world class flag-



ship wine from the same vineyard 2002 "g" Pago la Jara which is made in minute quantities. The grapes come from 50 years old ungrafted vines that are trodden by foot, vinified in wood fermentation vats then aged for 17 months in new French oak. The resulting wine in the glass has a sexy, dense ruby/purple colour; on the nose the luxurious scent of sweet figs, black cherry jam, cigar box and plum. In the mouth the wine is voluptuously textured and opulent with high glycerin, sweet tannins and layers of fruit; this is an exuberant, flamboyantly-styled wine.

Finally we tasted 2003 "Mattallana" Ribera del Duero DO Telmo's top wine from Ribera del Duero made with 100% Tempranillo. Ribera del Duero is one of Spain's most important appellations, a pioneer in the re-emergence of Spanish viticulture. The appellation is all about Tinto fino or Tinto del país, which produces intense, deeply coloured, full-bodied wines. High altitude vineyards are cultivated in an austere, almost moor-like landscape with narrow valleys based on sand and limestone soils. Typically, Telmo's vineyard is an old, classic site that had been abandoned. Their interest in this appellation is heightened by the mixtures of soil types it contains, in great contrast to Rioja, where a mixture of varieties is grown on a more homogeneous terroir. Qualities that reflect Telmo's character.

From such austerity comes the profound 2003 Matallana is a 200-case luxury cuvee aged 18 months in 100% new French oak. A Ribera del Duero of first-growth quality, it exhibits a complex perfume of roasted coffee, mocha, chocolate, creme de cassis, licorice, and smoke. Seamlessly knit with full-bodied opulence, superbly concentrated fruit, with no heaviness, and a long, 40-second finish, it has completely absorbed the wood component.

It's not surprising that a man who is so passionate about wine is also a big art lover. Being involved in the art crowd is essential for Telmo who believes it's important to also be inspired by non-wine people - as he puts it "Life is a lot of things not just wine." ■