



Written by Ferran Centelles 15 Feb 2017

Rioja'n'Roll and other Spanish finds

Rioja'n'Roll is the name of an unofficial association of eight restless winemakers in Rioja. They share the same purpose: introducing the B-side of present-day Rioja. The team includes five descendants of Spanish vine growers: Sandra Bravo (Sierra de Toloño), Eva Valgañón (Alegre y Valgañón), Bárbara Palacios (Barbarot), Roberto Oliván (Tentublo) and Arturo and Kike de Miguel Blanco (Artuke). They are joined by two Frenchmen - Tom Puyaubert (Exopto) and Olivier Rivière (Olivier Rivière) - and Bryan MacRobert (Laventura), who was born in Cape Town.

They have been turning heads since they gathered in the summer of 2015. They share motivations, goals and an engaging wine philosophy. They are new producers, first-generation wineries developing a sustainable business model with production varying from 15,000 to 100,000 bottles a year.

The celebrated wine saying 'the smaller the cooler' may seem unfair on bigger, quality-oriented producers but the truth in the case of Rioja'n'Roll is that all of them are pretty small with eye-catchingly cool projects.

They actually identify themselves as a group of friends with a common cause. 'In grape we trust', they claim. 'We love to spend time observing our vineyards. We want to get our hands and boots dirty, and respect the broad perspective of terroir; the soil, the climate and the human factor.'

I had the pleasure of meeting them during a presentation in Barcelona. I collected samples of their wines and tasted them in a relaxed environment at my office.

Tom Puyaubert points out, 'We might be smaller than others but we are totally committed to quality and transmitting terroir. We want to chase away the idea of Rioja being a region of inexpensive and low-quality wines', and they certainly do so. They do not necessarily share the same winemaking style. Sierra de Toloño, Alegre y Valgañón and Barbarot make more classical wines, whereas Exopto and Artuke seemed more on the modern side.

Do not expect to see any classical ageing classifications on the back labels as the members of their group have their doubts about section 22.3 of the Rioja regulations for wineries that make oak-aged wines. Translated directly from the regulation: 'wineries must have a minimum stock of 22,500 l of maturing wine, of which at least half must be kept in 50 oak barrels of 225 l approximate capacity'. This old-fashioned rule reduced fraud in the past but today is nonsense as it excludes any small project from using Crianza, Reserva or Gran Reserva on the back label.

Take a good look at my tasting notes and you will find some of the most promising new-wave riojas, produced in a respectful way, 'looking back at our ancestors'. This is clearly a group of winemakers to follow closely. The wines of Roberto Oliván were not tasted this time, but I hope to have the opportunity to write about them soon.

Escocés Volante etc

Writing about B-side wine people, I was also keen to taste the wines of Norrel Robertson MW (pictured above clutching a concrete egg), also known as The Flying Scotsman [no stranger to these pages; see this [wine of the week](http://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/the-pilgrimage-mencia-2006-bierzo) (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/articles/the-pilgrimage-mencia-2006-bierzo>) - JR]. Norrel is a wine maverick, bravely innovative with impeccable knowledge. He started producing wines in [Calatayud](http://www.jancisrobinson.com/ocw/detail/calatayud) (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/ocw/detail/calatayud>) in 2003 just after qualifying as an MW, having experienced harvest in Tuscany, Alentejo, Adelaide Hills and Chile. I still have his first Spanish wine, Manga del Brujo 2004, engraved on my heart as it was the first modern-style Garnacha I tasted from Calatayud, a wine that opened a new path in the region. I am sure you will have fun tasting his Galician whites, less fruity and tropical, fermented at higher temperatures than the standard, but with more depth and volume. Take a look also at the reds and in particular the outstanding Dos Dedos de Frente 2013, a superb hot-climate Syrah.

Lastly I recently came across two wines that grabbed my attention and are also included below. First, the new white wine from Astrales winery aged for 50 months in bottle with total absence of light. Second, a perfectionist but simple fruit-driven Garnacha from a cold area within Rioja. Both are remarkable in their different ways.

RIOJA'N'ROLL WHITES

- **Alegre & Valgañón 2015 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599019>)

Viura, Garnacha. Two different plots are used for this wine. On one side a 47-year-old vineyard planted on calcareous clay soils, and on the other a terraced 20-year-old vineyard. Hand-harvested, vertical press obtaining 50% efficiency, fermented and aged for nine months in French and Hungarian 500-litre oak barrels.

Intense nose showing bread, toasted seeds, dry nuts, ripe peach and quince. It is remarkable and complex. The palate is unctuous, voluminous and slightly warm. It keeps a very adequate balance between alcohol, lees character and flavours of dried flowers. It is very good quality. **GV** (FC)

Drink 2017-2020

€14 retail in Spain 16.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599019>)

- **Olivier Rivière, Mirando al Sur 2013 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599020>)

Viura. A white rioja inspired by Jerez, Mirando al Sur means looking towards the south. The wine is aged for 18 months in sherry casks followed by 12 months in tank on lees. Less than 800 bottles produced.

The wine has a very positive evolution and is clearly influenced by a delicate oak sensation showing toast, spices, smoke and ripe quince. Very showy and deep on the aromatics. Rich and creamy on the palate. Hedonistic and quite impressive, it is very influenced by the winemaking. However, I particularly like the style. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2020

17.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599020>)

- **Laventura Viura 2013 Rioja** (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599021>)

Mostly Viura with some other white grapes. Fermented and aged in 6000-litre oak barrels. 3,800 bottles produced.

It is very delicate and still youthful for a 2013, humble, reserved and very intriguing nose. It has a soft oak sensation, touch of smoke and white flowers. The palate is vibrant, concentrated and tight. It has a superb freshness. I like the oak management, the wine has a great potential to age. (FC)

12%

Drink 2017-2025

17 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599021>)

- **Laventura Malvasia 2013 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599022>)

High-altitude Malvasia, skin fermentation for three weeks and aged in cement egg for a year without adding sulphur. Production limited to 750 bottles.

The nose shows evolution and slightly oxidative character. It has notes of ripe apple, cider, honey and nuts. The palate is soft and rounded, broader than long. The fruit seems hidden due to the dominating tertiary notes. Very different from the average white rioja. It does not go unnoticed. (FC)

12%

Drink 2017-2020

16 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599022>)

- **Sierras de Toloño 2015 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599023>)

Viura. 6,000 bottles produced. Low-temperature fermentation, aged in oak.

The wine seem to be evolving quickly, it shows white pears, ripe cantaloupe melon and cream. Well made, balanced but not particularly concentrated. The wine is slightly limited on the aromatics but still pleasant on the palate. (FC)

12.5%

Drink 2017-2022

15.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599023>)

RIOJA'N'ROLL REDS

- **Exopto 2014 Rioja** (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599024>)

Graciano, Tempranillo, Garnacha. The Graciano is planted on sandy soils in Rioja Baja whereas Tempranillo and Garnacha come from a gravelly vineyard in Rioja Alavesa. Very limited yields of 3,500 kg/ha. Fermented in cement and oak vats, totally destemmed, wild yeast and aged in French oak barrels. 3,000 bottles have been made.

Big, concentrated and ripe nose displaying dark fruit, prunes, plums, cacao and oak. It also has a refreshing minty lift although the global expression is thrilling, ripe and intense. Full,

rich and fruit bomb on the palate, massive rustic tannins with enough creaminess to hold them. Explosive rioja. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2025

17.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599024>)

- **Exopto, Horizonte de Exopto 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599025>)

Tempranillo, Garnacha, Graciano. It is produced from bush-trained vines surrounding the Sonsierra area within Rioja Alta at 250-500 m elevation. 50- to 90-year-old vines, moderate yields of 4,000 to 5,000 kg/ha. It is fermented in oak and cement vats using wild yeast, ageing in used barrels of different sizes.

The nose is close to classical and shows cherries, plums, spices such as cloves and cedar, it is harmonious and clean. Medium body, well made with a comfortable and recognisable rioja style. Lots of pleasure without being lush. (FC)

13.5%

Drink 2017-2025

17 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599025>)

- **Laventura Tempranillo 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599026>)

Mainly Tempranillo from Rioja Alavesa with 20% Garnacha from Rioja Alta. 60-year-old vines. Open vat fermentation with punching down. Aged in 500- and 600-litre oak barrels.

Very complex and open nose, slightly natural (little sulphur dioxide) scent showing dried herbs, spices, earthiness and a leathery touch. It is soft and delicate on the palate with light clay-textured tannins. It has a burgundian style and is very good quality. I am not sure about its ageing capacity as it is already very open. (FC)

13%

Drink 2017-2020

16 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599026>)

- **Alegre & Valgañón, Tinto Coupage Tradicional 2012 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599027>)

70% Tempranillo, 30% Garnacha coming from bush-trained and traditionally cultivated vines located in three different areas. 20- to 45-year-old vines. Completely destemmed, four days of cold maceration, wild-yeast fermentation and aged for two years in 225-litre to 400-litre oak barrels. To be served lovingly, as requested on the front label.

This wine is the most classical of all Rioja'n'Roll tasting, clearly influenced by the oak and displaying sweet spices, cedar, cigar box and a resinous touch. Medium body and slightly drying mid palate with developing aromas. It starts to show some bouquet. A good classical wine but not especially delicate. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2022

15.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599027>)

- **Alegre & Valgañón, La Calleja 2010 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599028>)

1,07-ha single-vineyard Tempranillo located in Fonzaleche village within Rioja Alta. North-facing slope and sandy-calcareous soils. Yields are moderate (5,500 kg/ha). Hand-harvested, cold macerated and fermented with wild yeasts. 12 months ageing in 500-litre French oak barrels.

Classic nose dominated by oak and showing an appetising complexity: chocolate, toast, prunes, cloves and clean leather. The bouquet is already formed and expressive. There is still fresh fruit on the palate, quite delicate, pleasant and drinkable with light tannins. Evolving but giving pleasure now. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2022

16 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599028>)

- **Sierras de Toloño 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599029>)

Tempranillo planted in Rioja Alta at 650 m elevation. Hand-harvested and aged in French oak for six months.

Youthful, dominated by simple but appetising red fruit. It is soft and not overcharged, easy drinking and displaying good balance between oak and fruit. Comfortable wine. (FC)

13.5%

Drink 2017-2022

15 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599029>)

- **Sierras de Toloño, Rivas de Tereso 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599030>)

Single-vineyard Tempranillo planted on calcareous clay soils. Wild fermented at low temperatures in 300-litre amphorae. Very long fermentation with soft punch-down using just the hands. One year ageing in 500-litre oak barrels. Classy-looking bottle and very limited production of 700 bottles. The claim 'minimal intervention' is clearly marked on the label.

Very open and complex on the nose showing spices such as pepper, ripe black fruit, touch of farmyard, pastry and oak. It has a promising classical nose. The palate is slightly drying, medium in body and correctly balanced, I was expecting more concentration and depth but the overall expression is satisfying. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2022

16.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599030>)

- **Artuke, K4 2014 Rioja** (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599031>)

75% Tempranillo, 25% Graciano. This is a micro cuvée from Artuke winery, 1,000 bottles sourced from the best plots within their vineyards in Abalos (Rioja Alavesa). The vines were planted in 1950 at 530 m elevation and they are bush-trained. Hand-harvested, sorting table, small 2,000-litre vats used for fermentation, aged for 14 months in 600-litre foudres. 1,000 bottles produced.

It is generous in fruit. It has a ripe, fleshy and slightly herby note on the nose showing creaminess and oak. Explosion of sweet fruit on the plate, enormous, solid and deep. Superbly placed oak and far above the mean in fruit concentration. It is fleshy, juicy, clean and pure. Not standard rioja in style but great and serious stuff. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2025

18 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599031>)

- **Artuke, Finca de los Locos 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599032>)

80% Tempranillo, 20% Graciano. Single vineyard planted in 1981 in Baños de Ebro within Rioja Alavesa at 520 m elevation. 2.8 ha and slightly sloped. Hand-harvested, sorting table and totally destemmed. 12-16 months ageing in French oak. Not stabilised. 10,000 bottles produced.

Very ripe and modern showing plentiful aromas and great depth, dark ripe plums, ripe cherries, cranberry jam, toasted oak, green leaves and a touch of spice. Very consistent and balanced on the palate, with generous sweet fruit and fleshy ripe tannins. Superb texture and rich fruit. The wine is more physical than elegant but is really terrific. Where does this surprising savoury fruit come from? Unusual richness for a rioja. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2025

18 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599032>)

- **Artuke, La Condenada 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599033>)

Mainly Tempranillo with Graciano, Garnacha and Palomino. Single vineyard in Baños del Ebro within Rioja Alavesa, planted in 1920 on sandy soils. Hand harvested and destemmed by hand. Small 2,000-litre vats used for fermentation, aged 14 months in 600-litre foudres. 1,200 bottles produced.

The nose is complex and deep; it shows lots of spices, coffee, chocolate, liquorice and ripe red fruit. It is creamy and consistent on the palate, extreme in terms of concentration but still well built. I particularly like the fine-grained tannins that are well supported by generous fruit. Not classical winemaking style for rioja. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2025

17.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599033>)

- **Bárbara Palacios, Barbarot 2011 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599034>)

80% Tempranillo, 20% Merlot. The vineyard is in Haro at 480 m elevation within Rioja Alta. Planted in 1990, at that time the Consejo Regulador permitted a limited quantity of experimental varieties with the Bárbara family betting on Merlot. Hand-harvested, cold maceration and intense cap management during fermentation. Post-fermentation maceration from two to four weeks. 18 months' ageing in used oak barrels. Neither filtered nor clarified. The wine is showing a developing and classic aromatic profile. It is dominated by sweet spices and oak. Intense and firm tannins with fruit diminishing due to its evolution. Still enjoyable. She is a promising winemaker and one to be watched. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2020

15 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599034>)

- **Olivier Rivière, Losares 2013 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599035>)

Mainly Tempranillo, Graciano, Mazuelo. This is the much-anticipated top wine from Olivier Rivière. Very old plot planted in 1930 with different grape varieties mixed in a field blend. Heavy bottle and very attractive label. Just 600 bottles produced.

The nose is quite delicate and fragrant showing violets and spicy notes. It is deep and intriguing but the fruit is underneath. Delicate and soft on the palate, light in fruit expression with firm and drying tannins still to be integrated. It has great potential but needs time to mellow. I would love to see its evolution. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2030

16? (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599035>)

- **Olivier Rivière, Ganko 2014 Rioja**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599036>)

Garnacha, Mazuelo. Very old vines from Cardenas village within Rioja Alta. Old vines and very limited yields. Long but delicate maceration during fermentation. 4,000 bottles produced.

Great delicacy and deep nose, beautifully light-hearted showing ripe cherries, violets, touch of dry herbs and great class. Precisely delineated with delicate fruit balancing the velvety tannins. Soft, light and in some way burgundian. A new approach and interpretation of the region that I particularly like. It seems that the nose will gain complexity with age. (FC)

13.5%

Drink 2017-2025

17.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599036>)

NORREL ROBERTSON MW

- **El Escocés Volante, The Cup & Rings Albariño 2014 Rías Baixas**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599037>)

Albariño from the O Salnes area planted on granitic and slate soils. Hand-harvested, cold stored and gentle pressing, stainless-steel fermentation, 50% of the wine went through malolactic fermentation for a final 24 months maturing on its lees.

The wine shows positive evolution, and perfectly demonstrates the ageing capacity of Albariño. Fruit is slightly hidden and creamy notes are dominating, it has ripe peach and white-flower notes underneath. It combines creaminess and a contrasting green acidity, more elegant than vigorous but well built. The palate is outstanding but it is a bit shy on flavours.

(FC)

13%

Drink 2017-2020

16.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599037>)

- **El Escocés Volante, The Cup & Rings Godello 2015 Monterrei**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599038>)

Godello. This is the project of Norrel Robertson together with the Terras do Cigarrón winery. The parcel is harvested in two different ripening tranches, an early pick and then a later one from the higher part of the vineyard. Hand-harvested, stored in a cool room, just the free-run juice is used, 80% fermented in stainless steel. 20% is fermented in large French oak barrels. Fermentation is slow and carried by burgundian yeast at ambient temperatures of 18 °C.

Very clean and pure in expression, delicate nose showing anise, peach, apricot and a touch of lees. It is very easy-going, crystalline, fresh but not particularly deep. Perfect winemaking, it will please all audiences. (FC)

13%

Drink 2017-2020

16 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599038>)

- **El Escocés Volante, Manda Huevos 2014 Vino de España**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599039>)

Mainly Macabeo with some Garnacha. Manda Huevos might be translated as 'I can't believe it' or 'get out of here'. This wine comes from Villarroya in Calatayud but Robertson felt obliged to label it as coming from outside the appellation. The vineyard is planted in the foothills of Sierra de la Virgen at 900 m. It ferments in 900-litre cement egg-shaped vessels and spends 10 months on its lees. 3,000 bottles produced.

Non-conventional tasting profile: green and austere, cold and mineral expression, fine but not particularly intense, it shows aromas of ripe green fruit and chamomile. The palate it totally straight and tight showing green notes, nervous and refreshing. Unconventional, even difficult on the palate, but I particularly like the austerity and greenness it has. It is very bold and idiosyncratic within Spain. (FC)

13%

Drink 2017-2020

16.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599039>)

- **El Escocés Volante, Manda Huevos 2014 Vino de España**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599040>)

Garnacha, Moristel, Bobal and Garnacha Blanca. The vineyard is in Villarroya village within Calatayud but the producer had to make this wine outside the appellation. It comes from two different plots, one planted in 1908 and the other in 1970. Fermentation in open vats and 10 months maturing in egg-shaped cement vessels. No oak used.

Unconventional-tasting for a Garnacha, fruit seems to be hidden and the nose is reserved. Tight and austere on the palate, it doesn't have a stereotypically sweet-driven palate. Without defects but nervous and restrained. I would love to follow its evolution, as it seems to be too young now. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2022

15 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599040>)

- **El Escocés Volante, En Sus Trece Ancient Vine Garnacha 2013 Vino de España** (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599041>)

Old-vine Garnacha, this is a blend of different plots within the Calatayud region, mainly planted on schist soils. 'En sus trece' is a Spanish expression that might be translated as 'stick to your guns'. Aged for 10 months in egg-shaped vessels.

Quintessential Garnacha style showing ripe black berry, ripe prunes, black cherries and liquorices. Well-managed sweet fruit on the nose. Youthful, fleshy, juicy but not over-extracted, lovely sweet tannins and almost picture-perfect in balance. Long and very well packaged. It completely meets the expectations for Garnacha. (FC)

14%

Drink 2017-2022

17.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599041>)

- **El Escocés Volante, Dos Dedos de Frente 2013 Calatayud**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599042>)

97% Syrah, 3% Viognier. The vineyard is situated at 950 m and it is planted on pudding stones. Cold maceration with Syrah and Viognier fermented together. Long macerated for three weeks after fermentation and aged for 20 months in old French oak barrels. 'Dos dedos de frente' is a Spanish expression translated as 'a little piece of intelligence'. 3,300 bottles produced.

Very pure and intense nose showing ripe dark fruit, cloves, clean oak and a meaty touch. Great nose. It is muscular and has a good shape, well built with fine-grained tannins, savoury and harmonious alcohol and fruit balance. It is big, fleshy and yummy. Extremely hedonistic and superb delineation. I take my hat off to this wine. (FC)

15%

Drink 2017-2022

18 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599042>)

ASTRALES

- **Astrales Godello 2011 Valdeorras**

(<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599043>)

Godello, aged for 50 months in bottle in a totally light-free environment.

Surprisingly youthful for a 2011, it has a complex and delicate nose showing bread, ripe pineapple and quince. It has a voluminous but refined palate, mouth-coating, remarkable acidity, fleshy stone fruit and touch of toast. It is an unctuous wine, with superb concentration and delicate bitterness. Clean and noteworthy for its age. (FC)

13.5%

Drink 2017-2025

17 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599043>)

JUAN CARLOS SANCHA

- **Juan Carlos Sancha, Peña El Gato Viñas Viejas Garnacha 2015**

Rioja (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599044>)

Old-vine Garnacha planted at 700 m in Valdan within La Rioja Alta. The vineyard is monitored by the renowned viticulture researcher Fernando Martinez de Toda. It is fermented and aged in 500-litre oak barrels. The wine achieves a pH of 3.2, remarkably low for a Garnacha.

It has a lovely nose showing a well-ripened expression, totally dominated by fruit, red cherries, cranberry and touch of spice. The winemaking respects the fruit with superbly placed oak. The tannins are soft and gentle, it is slightly warm although balanced and rounded. Not massive at all, more delicate than the standard for Garnacha. I particularly like the fruity and controlled aspect of this wine. It is refined and eye-catching. (FC)

15%

Drink 2017-2022

16.5 (<http://www.jancisrobinson.com/tastings/view/599044>)