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Prats (finally) does Monastrell

25 Jul 2011 by Luis Gutiérrez

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It is not surprising to hear that Bruno Prats of Cos d'Estournel fame is making wine north, south, east and west, be it in Portugal, South Africa or Chile. But what I had not heard is that he already has wine from Spain under his belt. Well, it is bottled and labelled, and ready for sale, but nobody had heard about it in Spain.

I met with the winemaker and partner in this project at a Madrid restaurant to try the wines, and we bumped into one of the main wine distributors in Spain, a partner of Telmo Rodriguez. He had not heard a word about the project. I mention Telmo because there is a link between him and this project. Bruno Prats and Telmo have been friends for many years. After selling Cos d'Estournel, Prats was looking into different alternatives for investment, and one of them was Spain, more specifically Alicante. He looked into it with the help of Telmo and travelled there because he was very keen, but for one reason or another it didn't happen. Many years later he has done exactly what he wanted to do originally. And it seems that the idea was much, much older than that. Prats got fixated by it when studying oenology at Montpellier in 1967 and hearing professor Jean Brana raving about the old Monastrell vineyards of Alicante area, where the variety originates.

Zooming forward to 2008, Prats returned to Alicante in search of some space in its port for his new boat, and the spark must have been reignited. At the same time, he had someone working for him who wanted to move into a Spanish-speaking country to make wine.

Frenchman Stéphane Point (pictured below), born in 1973, studied oenology in Bordeaux and as soon as he finished in 1999 he was hired by Prats to go to Portugal and make the wine from his partnership with the Symington family. He made Chryseia that year, but the wine was never sold, and the first release was 2000.



The modus operandi for Prats is to find a local partner who has the knowledge and the contacts, which make things so much easier. As mentioned, he works with the [Symingtons](#) in the Douro, with Felipe de Solminihac and [Paul Pontallier](#) in Chile, and with the [Jooste family](#) from Klein Constantia in South Africa. So in February 2009, Stéphane Point landed in Alicante with his Chilean wife. He started walking round all the vineyards and knocking on all the winery doors.

Point and Prats did not actually find such a partner, but found some very nice vineyards,

and drank some local Monastrell wine that persuaded them to stay. So Stéphane took a percentage of the new adventure and they established Ibérica Bruno Prats. They did hire some space inside the Salvador Poveda winery, well-known for producing Fondillón (one day I'll tell you a little about this extraordinary wine), and also the winery where Telmo Rodriguez makes his Al Muvedre. That's how in 2009 they made some 15,000 bottles of wine from the Alicante DO. For now they have no vineyards; they have agreements with local growers which give them the flexibility to source grapes from different soils, areas and vine age.

Stéphane tells me that he likes elegant wines, without excess oak or ripeness. And in all fairness, when the easiest thing is to make oaky, very ripe wines in a region where all vintages are warm, the wines are balanced, fresh and not marked by the barrels. He thinks they are both modern and traditional: all grapes are destalked after passing through a selection table, and grapes, must and wine are moved exclusively by gravity. Fermentation is by plot, in small stainless-steel tanks with temperature control, and the élevage is mostly in used 400-litre French oak barrels for 12 to 14 months.

The wines were presented for the first time at a small dinner on 22 June in Bordeaux during Vinexpo (I couldn't go), but nothing had been revealed until then. Not even people that are (relatively) close knew anything about these wines...

They made two wines in 2009. The names are quite unusual: Mosyca and Alfynal. The former is a blend of 25% Mo(nastrell), 30% Sy(rah) and 25% Ca(bernet) and the rest Petit Verdot (which would make the name far too complex!), while the latter is made exclusively from Monastrell.

Mosyca (which is spelt and sounds almost like *mosca*, meaning 'fly', the insect -and now that I write it again it could also be *música*), has a certain Atlantic profile within its Mediterranean style, as even a small portion of Cabernet Sauvignon is very noticeable in any blend. It is a serious wine, with some austerity and the minty Cabernet notes joining the ripe Monastrell fruit. It is drinking well already, a little international in style, in my opinion.

Alfynal is another story. It is pure, old-vine Monastrell from dry-farmed vineyards, seven different plots between 35 and 70 years old that yield no more than 2,500 kg/ha. The name of the wine is literally *al final*, which means 'in the end' or, rather, 'finally'. A pretty good name, having waited since 1967! It joins Casa Castillo's Pie Franco and Enrique Mendoza's Estrecho in the elite corps of Spanish Monastrells. It has soft tannins, and opens up in the glass revealing some tree bark and aniseed notes, typical for (good) Monastrell in my book, while keeping fresh with a long finish. But more than anything it has a sense of elegance and balance that for me is a tell-tale sign of a great wine with great ageing potential.

There are 7,500 bottles of each, and the quantities could grow for Mosyca, but not so much for Alfynal, as they are limited by the amount of old vineyards available. One of the risks, not only in Alicante but throughout Spain, is that old vineyards get ripped up because the yield is so low. The wines are sold through [Fidelis Wines](#), Prats' sales company in Bordeaux (and more recently with an office also in Shanghai), and they retail in Spain at €10-€12 for Mosyca and around €25 for Alfynal. So it's finally here!

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