



Wine Club Tasting Notes

December 2007

2006 El Chaparral de Vega Sindoa Old Vines Garnacha Navarra, Spain

Even if you come into Gervais & Vine only three times a year, it probably isn't lost on you that we LOVE Spanish wines, particularly the ones of the red persuasion. (In fact, as Woody Allen said in *Annie Hall*, we don't just love them we "lurve" them.) Why? Their quality-to-value ratio is almost unbeatable by any other country in the world. Granted, Spanish wines are rocketing to international stardom, causing more and more very expensive, boutique-y wines to enter the arena, but the beauty is, the majority of Spanish reds are still deliciously affordable. The wine in this month's bag is from the venerable Jorge Ordonez, one of the leading importers of Spanish wines. In fact, this human dynamo who imports Spain's biggest, deepest wine portfolio to America is not your everyday importer. Jorge Ordonez goes way beyond buy and sell; he advises, cajoles, teaches, pleads, strong-arms, and consults with wineries all over Spain to update techniques, explore old grapes and new properties, and - bottom line - make better wine. He candidly offers fresh ideas and constructive criticism on quality control, vineyard management, dreaming up new blends, marketing, and packaging. His astonishing track record - 130 wines from 40 wineries - speaks volumes, but it was an uphill struggle from 1987 poverty to 2005 plenty. "When nobody cared about Spanish wines," he claims proudly, "I was there."

Many people don't realize is that Spain is a very ancient wine land, making wine long before the Romans. Spain also has the largest vineyard plantings on earth, but is third in production because they do not irrigate. Here's the conundrum - Spain has some of the best vineyards on earth with low-yielding, old vines (enough to make most wine growers pea-green with envy), BUT the country is lacking in savvy winemakers by comparison. Fortunately, Jorge has snapped up many of these talented winemakers and consequently he is able to give the world some of the tastiest juice Spain has to offer.

El Chaparral hails from Navarra, an appellation located in north-central Spain. This region's winemaking history dates back to the Roman occupation and its wines were long well-regarded. At the end of the nineteenth century, phylloxera (a nasty little vine louse) took its toll, shrinking the vineyard acreage from an estimated 120,000+ acres to less than 2000 acres. Today there are about 35,000 acres, with Garnacha (Grenache) being the dominant grape and grown in over half the vineyards. This month's wine comes from 60+ year old vines and is (as my father would say) a helluva bargain. Dark for its varietal, the wine shows the positive effects of extended maceration and wonderful texture resulting from 8-months aging on the lees in French oak. Bright, briary red fruit consisting of black cherry, raspberries and red currents intermingle nicely with black

pepper and spicy nuances. This wine is so tasty, you may want to just enjoy it on its own, but it will marry well with many different foods. My suggestion would just do the 'cultural' thing and enjoy it very simply – with a plate of olives, a bit of Manchego cheese and a good friend!