

Bodegas San Francisco Javier

Jerez de la Frontera

FINO

One of Spain's best white Wines?

In 2017 a dream came through. I was able to buy a Bodega in Jerez. It had been a dream since 1993 when I first visited Jerez in the south of Spain.

One of the things that hit me during the first visit some 20 years ago was that nobody made vineyard designated Finos. For most of the wine-world origin is very important. Not so in Jerez, volume was and is clearly prioritized. The reason given was that the process (aging under flor) erases any sign of origin. For me that didn't sound right more as a cheap excuse for producing large quantities of nondescript wine.

As my life continued as a winemaker in Ribera de Duero and later in Bordeaux the Sherry dream still lingered. Many people had asked me to produce a white brother/sister to Pingus. Tasting all over Spain I never really fell in love with any of the white wine areas until one day it dawned on me that the Fino is probably the single greatest white wine of Spain. The problem being that people never thought about Fino as a white wine in its own right. Pre "Selosse" something similar happened in Champagne. We now all know that the greatest Champagnes are just as much wine of origin as any other great wine in the world.



The label for Viña Corrales; designed by Studio Masbe

The Vineyard

In Jerez the vineyards are organized within “Pagos”. Pagos are large vineyard areas. Marchanudo, Carrascal, Balbaínas, Añina and Los Tercios being some of the better known. Diego Paraday Barreto, writing in 1868 listed 134 Pagos in all, each of which are carefully classified.

In some cases, wines have used the Pago on the label, Fino Inocente from Marchanudo being a good example. But none used the single vineyards within the Pagos.

My idea is to produce Fino from single vineyards as you would in the greatest vineyards of the world.

We have bought 10 Ha in all. 8 Ha in Pago Balbaína, historically famous for producing outstanding wine for Finos. The vineyard is historically called “Viña Corrales”.

We also bought 2 Ha in Pago Marchanudo. “Viña La Cruz”. Marchanudo the famous Pago of the Domecq family and famous for producing Amontillados (Amontillado is the result of “over aging” the Fino.) This Pago is more inland than Balbaínas (that overlook the sea) so the grapes tend to ripen more, producing wines of more extract and body.



Foto from the vinyard's house
The origin of the name

The Winery

In an ideal world to produce 100 % vineyard designated wines you should lay down your own Solera. It would then take you 10-15 years to produce your first wines. Let's just say that I did not have time or money to do that. The second-best thing is to buy an old existing Solera and start topping it up with your own young wine. This is what we started doing in the autumn of 2017 after our first harvest.

The cellar is an old Almacenista (wholesaler) Cellar founded by Don Angle Zamorano in the 60's. Funny enough using young wine from Pago Balbaína. In the old days when the big Sherry companies were shippers more than producers, the Almacenistas were the stock carriers that sold wine to the Shippers for their blends.

The cellar has 438 botas (Jerez barrels of 600 liters) the cellar is organized in "Solera" where we each year draw off the wine and then 5 more layers (Criaderas) that lodge the younger wines. 1st Criadera to 5th, older to young. 5th and 4th hold the young wine or the "sobretablas". 3rd starts the blending process. The "Solera" is topped up with wine from the 1st Criadera. The "Vina Corrales" will be a Spring bottling and the Viña La Cruz could be an autumn one being more in line with Pago Marchanudo that is a more "Fino-Amontillado" type Pago (an old style that is no longer in use)



The label for Viña Corrales; designed by Studio Masbe

For the Viña Corrales we have 74 botas in the “Solera” and 244 Botas in the Criaderas. The yearly production will be around 8000 bottles drawn from the “Solera” in Spring when the Flor (yeast) is most active. We draw around 80 liters from each barrel (around 14 %)

The Vina La Cruz will come from a second Solera system with 21 botas in the solera and 99 botas in the Criaderas. This system holds only wine from Pago Marchanudo (we sold all the old wine and bought new wine from Pago Marchanudo) on top of the old valuable lees (cabezuelas). I still do not have a firm idea when we will start to produce from this “Solera”, but it could be 2022 or 2023. Meanwhile we top up with wine from Viña La Cruz

There will only be one “saca” or drawing from the barrels a year. The “Vina Corrales” will be a Spring bottling and the Viña La Cruz could be an Autumn bottling being more in line with Pago Marchanudo that is a more “Fino-Amontillado” type Pago (an old style that is no longer in use)



The hallway in the Cellar of Bodega San Francisco Javier

The Wine

Following the idea that these wines are to be understood more as a white wine, the wines are bottled in a Burgundy bottle under a Diam cork. The label is simple, only stating the type (Fino) the area (Jerez de la Frontera) the Vineyard (Viña Corrales or Viña La Cruz) and the Pago (Balbainas or Marchanudo). The year of the bottling is stated on the label and also on the Cork. The great thing about this new style Fino is that they can age, not that they need to, but like the best Champagnes do tend to get better with time. This is of outmost importance as one of the problems with most Finos today is the fact that they lose their freshness very fast and restaurants are therefore afraid of buying them.



The bottle and label of Viña Corrales

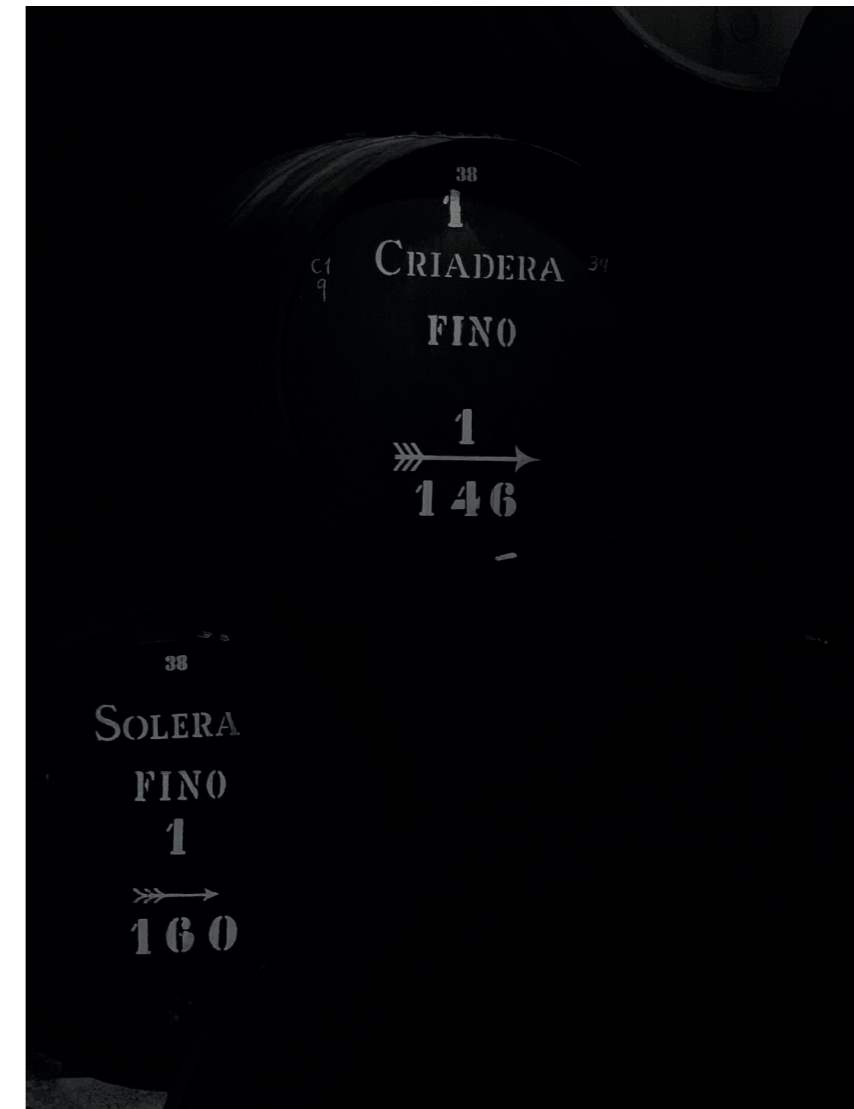
The 2020 bottling or Saca

This year should have been the first to produce a full production (8000 bottles) of “Viña Corrales” but the bottling in April coincided with the Covid-19 outbreak and all the insecurity that led to it. We therefore only made a minor bottling of 1200 bottles.

However systems of Solera and Criaderas needs movement in order to refresh the system otherwise the Flor yeast starts to die. So we are going to do an Autumn bottling as well this year only. It will be a small one (max 4000 bottles) as we do not want to disturb the wine too much for the next year’s bottling in April-May.

Valbuena 19/10-2020

PETER SISSECK



The barrel in Bodea San Fransisco Javier

Review form Wine Advocate by Luis Guiterrez

NV Bodegas San Francisco Javier Fino Viña Corrales Pago Balbaína

Rating

96

Reviewed by

Luis Gutiérrez

Release Price

\$50

Issue Date

17th Sep 2020

Drink Date

2020 - 2028

Source

September 2020 Week 3, The Wine Advocate

Producer:

From: Spain , Andalucía , Jerez Color: White

Type: Fortified

Sweetness: Dry

Type: Fortified

Variety: Palomino

The NV Fino Viña Corrales Pago Balbaína (bottled in 2020, which is also shown on the cork) comes from the old solera of Camborio, and the bottled wine is eight to nine years old on average. This is a single-vineyard Fino from a plot in Balbaína with “tosca de barajuela” albariza soils, a kind of laminated limestone that is highly sought after. The vineyard is currently in the process to become certified or-organic. They selected the wine in spring, when the flor is working at full capacity and after the “beticus” yeasts (which gives complexity a little à la Meursault) have calmed down a little. That yeast represents some 25% of the solera and the rest is “moltuliensis,” a yeast that produces more acetaldehyde. It’s a bright golden color, and the nose is textbook old Fino (what in the past could be called Fino Amontillado, a mention that isn’t allowed anymore) with notes of dried herbs, wet chalk and some iodine with a twist of volatility. They want a vinous wine, and it’s incredibly textured, powerful but with great freshness and very tasty flavors and even some notes of celery on the finish. This is a powerful and fresh Fino, pungent and persistent, long, amazingly elegant, vibrant and alive. I was “floored” by the complexity and elegance of this wine. It feels light without actually being light, with the finesse of Balbaína starting to show through in the blend. The incredible lightness of Fino! This first saca consisted of 1,200 Burgundy bottles that were filled unfiltered (en rama) in April 2020. Future sacas should be around 8,000 bottles, but this first one is going to be quite scarce.

<https://www.robertparker.com/wines/YfhZMaKBz6g2CvkCs>