



PALACIO DE FEFIÑANES

A Legacy

WORDS CARLOS READ PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF PALACIO DE FEFIÑANES

Palacio de Fefiñanes is a veritable institution, for not only was it the first winery to bottle Albariño way back in 1928, but it is a remnant of one of Spain's oldest marquisates.

The Marquesado de Figueroa was granted by Carlos II in 1675 and Juan Gil – or to give him his full title – Juan Gil de Araujo y González de Careaga – is the 14th Marquis of the lineage, which takes its name from the charming Torre de Figueroa, near Betanzos, which is of medieval origin and Juan's main residence.

Needless to say, military figures loom large in the family's rich history and many of Juan's forebears occupied important posts not just in Galicia – where their historic responsibilities included raising taxes and troops and later politics – but throughout the Spanish Empire in places such as Naples, Peru, Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Flanders, Germany and Russia. Many fought in far away wars not least against Napoleon, but the family archive reveals a wealth of academics and politicians too.

The Pazo de Fefiñanes with its imposing renaissance Palace majestically dominates the main square of Cambados, and in its present form the latter dates back to 1583, for the original building was much older (possibly Romanesque) and it was in that year that its reconstruction was at last finished by the first Viscount of Fefiñanes.

Even then wine production was already important, though it was only in 1928 that the family decided they should make it a formal business, duly registered the brand and were the first ever bottlers of Albariño; for official denomination would not start until around fifty years later, meanwhile Galician aficionados would feast on the glorious seasonal fish and shellfish in eateries that bought whatever they could from a myriad of producers none of whom bothered with labels.

Today Rias Baixas (DO since 1988) is of course a big business with an important bureaucracy, which some time ago split the areas under vines into five quite diverse growing zones; but the key to Fefiñanes' quality and success is the fact that the wines of the Salnés Valley (made entirely from Albariño unlike some of the interesting variants down south that often include Caiño Blanco and Loureiro) – with its frequent fogs, mild, damp climate but generally warm dry summers, granitic soils that impart pronounced minerality and its proximity to the sea contributing saline and other elements – result in vintages of spectacular delicacy and finesse: its vines trained on high trellises to keep the grapes ventilated and away from the often soggy ground.



Fefiñanes of course has also moved with the times and so while modern wine facilities were custom built to fit into its ancient granite cloisters when Juan took over in the late 1990s, though in the huge adjacent lot at the rear – often used for big weddings – there are magnificent centenary vines, its quality fruit comes primarily from a historical repertoire of some 66 mainly local family growers whose vineyards vary in age from eight to 80, with an average of over 40 but some well over a hundred. The soils tend to be sandy but with elements of limestone and clay and have naturally high acidity from the preponderance of decomposed granite. They are usually shallow over an underlying impermeable layer of either rock or clay – and with the vineyards at heights not much above sea-level, some very close to the ría (or fiord), frosts are extremely rare.

WHAT ABOUT JUAN?

Despite the awesome burden of history, Juan is descended directly from Francisco Javier de Losada y Pardo de Figueroa, who was simultaneously the 8th Marquis of Figueroa and the ninth Viscount of Fefiñanes. He is a charming diplomat,



urbane yachtsman and horseman, who is pragmatic, affable, direct but softly spoken: to the extent that in 2012 he was unanimously voted in as President of the Rías Baixas DO to travel domestically and worldwide exalting the glories of his region in a quiet, dignified, but passionate manner.

Son of a Galician father and Basque mother, he was brought up and studied primarily in Madrid where he would meet his lovely wife María Victoria – daughter of an important notary in Madrid – with whom he has three children.

Driven, however, by the *morriña* innate in all Galicians, he unsurprisingly wound up going home to take over the reins of the famous family wine business in the late 1990s – firmly convinced that he would be a fine ambassador capable of maintaining the quality of its already excellent and much lauded wines, keeping them in the limelight, and juggling the practical complexities and challenges of a relatively small business in an ever-growing but very particular region and an increasingly competitive world.

This is precisely what he has done and continues to do. ☺

THE WINES

ALBARIÑO DE FEFIÑANES 2016 (13.5%)

The winery's most popular, flagship wine; the grapes are harvested the fourth week of September, with the wine cold fermented in stainless steel for two weeks but not bottled until late February, so rested. Lustrous, green-flecked lemon water ice in hue; very fine with expressive but understated notes of apple, peach, and zesty citrus elements; crisp and refreshing with excellent acidity, verve, backbone and length – all of which augur well for this vintage to improve significantly in the bottle (drink ideally by summer 2018). Total production 135,000 bottles and 2,000 Magnums, this is a most versatile aperitif. Perfect too with all manner of fish, shellfish, and mild to medium intensity cheeses; but also suited to most oriental dishes as well as tuna or steak tartare.

ALBARIÑO DE FEFIÑANES 1583 2015 (12.5%)

First produced in 1995, this limited production classic is made from specially selected grapes growing on low altitude thin sandy loam soils that lie over granite, and is named to celebrate the year in which restoration of the Palace was completed. The grapes were harvested 17.09.15; the wine started its fermentation in temperature controlled stainless steel but finished in French barrique to later spend four months in barrique followed by a limited time in tank. Pale, sheeny lemon ice water in hue; ripe, but with understated notes of citrus, melon and white peach and a subtle suggestion of herbs shored up by a harmonious twist of oak, which provides the wine's backbone. Should continue to unravel until late 2018. Total production 12,265 bottles and 400 magnums; do not over-chill and partner with goose barnacles (percebes), sashimi, rice with lobster, or baked fish.

ALBARIÑO DE FEFIÑANES III AÑO 2013 (12.5%)

First produced in 2002, this wine comprises a single tank from the best three or four plots under the winery's control and is made only in exceptional vintages. The grapes were harvested during the last week of September; the wine was cold fermented in stainless steel and afterwards spent 27 months in tank, six months of which on its lees, to be bottled in late February 2016. Lustrous pale straw in hue, with ripe, candied fruits primarily of apple compote and pear together with elements of linden blossom and camomile. Round, densely textured and gentle, although still fresh, it is almost unctuous and has the backbone and verve to ensure spectacular development in the bottle – sit on perhaps until the summer of 2018. Total production was 6,062 bottles, and it's best partnered with all manner of fish and shellfish, tuna or steak tartare, or indeed sushi.