

## **Tastings - Searching for Châteauneuf**

In February I went French for a few days and popped up to the annual Vinisud event in Montpellier. An excellent professional wine exhibition that focuses on the south of France, it showcases close to 1,500 wineries--in just three days. It's insane to just stroll in casually and you have to go there with a mission which for me was: experience as much Châteauneuf-du-Pape as possible. Sure, I tasted plenty of others as well, but Châteauneuf is one of those high quality French appellations that you don't see on the shelf much in Spain.

Price is one factor given that the nice bottles start about 20€ and go up quite rapidly from there. But the other is the main reason I love these wines in that they're robust, wonderfully expressive Southern European wines with a Grenache focus from stony soils. This is not something unfamiliar in Catalonia and so the French find themselves competing with the much more wallet friendly wines here, especially in DOQ Priorat. The stones may be different (slate versus large river stones), but the results of each region resemble each other on many levels. Let's take a look at a couple of options.

### **La Conreria d'Scala Dei - La Conreria 2012 12€**

I'm always mystified as to why more people don't know La Conreria. I suppose it is partially due to inhabiting a village with the much larger Cellers de Scaladei. But, I enjoy all of their wines and overall the quality-price relation is excellent for Priorat.

This creation by enolog Jordi Vidal offers up a great deal with a big chunk of Grenache in the blend. Dark, succulent fruits dominate the aromas and body with a touch of mineral elements and tar as well. While a touch jammy in to the finish, it still holds enough acidity to pair very nicely with meals or to just enjoy on its own.

### **Família Nin-Ortiz - Planetes de Nin 2011 29€**

People probably know Ester Nin more for her work on the limited and much sought after Clos Erasmus with Priorat pioneer, Daphne Glorian. But, Ester has her own cellar in Porrera with her partner Carles Ortiz and it's excellent in its own right.

There's lovely, complex minerality in the nose along with clean, crisp red fruits. The body dances across the palate and stays wonderfully light while developing these incredible floral aspects that carry in to a soft finish that lingers forever and evolves endlessly as it breathes. I find that this wine has Châteauneuf elements seen in wines of twice this cost and it, along with its big sister, Nit de Nin offer up decadent options worth looking in to if you're not familiar with them.