

Telmo Rodriguez

DO Málaga & DO Sierras de Málaga

'Mountain Blanco' Moscatel Seco

'MR', 'Molino Real' and 'Old Mountain' Mountain wine Moscatels Dulces

Málaga, Mountain Wine and Moscatel

Once the most important vineyard area in Andalusia (at the end of the 19th century, arguably the most important place in Spain's wine history) Málaga wine virtually disappeared during the 20th. Located between the snowy mountains of Granada and the Mediterranean, these green, fertile, slate-covered slopes (hillsides just a few km in from the Mediterranean southern coast of Spain) are home to some of the purest Muscats in the world. Málaga Moscatel (Muscat of Alexandria) is a 'vid antica', one of the few varieties which have never been genetically modified.



Moscatel is the same variety which produces, variously, Moscato d'Asti in Piedmont; Passito de Pantelleria in Sicily and many of the other great Muscat wines of the world, including Australia. It's arguably, the most important great wine variety in world wine history, given the significance of the ship-based trade routes in and around the Mediterranean, and the preservative effects of sugar. In Málaga, 'Mountain Wine' has traditionally been made in a fashion somewhat similar to the Passito wines of Italy – picked ripe, raisined on mats, then fermented in open stone fermenters and given long barrel ageing in old wood.

By the late 1990s, however, all that remained of Málaga wine were a couple of local co-ops. It was the history and endangered status of this southern Spanish treasure wine that drove Telmo and Pablo to launch their Málaga project, with the idea of reviving 'mountain wine' as a terroir wine: a hot slate Muscat made from sun-kissed raisins.

The Málaga hills are actually home to two overlapping appellations. DO Málaga regulates the historical styles of both fortified and naturally sweet 'Mountain Wines'. Although only conferred in 1999, the appellation replaced long-existing producer organisations which had self-regulated Málaga sweet whites since around 1500. DO Sierras de Málaga, conferred in 2001, oversees production of dry table wines, predominantly white and pink. Viticulture, and the local evolution of Moscatel, commenced here with the arrival of the Phoenicians, hundreds of years prior to the incursion of Roman wine culture. DO Málaga protects appellations working exclusively with 'local' Moscatel and PX, while the 'Sierras' appellation also allows exotic breeds such as Chardonnay, Macabeo, Tempranillo, Cabernet and more.

Cómpeta: between the sea and the snow

Even now, there only about 6 producers remaining. The predominant styles are residually sweet Moscatels, some fortified, some not, nearly all raisined during a short 'Pasero' of around 10 days' drying on mats. Some wines are realised as pristine sweet whites, while others are oxidatively matured, perhaps even caramelised and burnt black. Telmo works in the hills around the village of Cómpeta, where he shares bodega facilities with Pepe Ávila at Bodega Almirajara. Pepe makes traditionally-styled Moscatels, both naturally sweet and fortified, including 'Nectar' which spends 3 years in old barrel and starts to blacken as sugars oxidise and caramelise. Since the mid-1990s, Telmo and Pablo have spent years renovating the mountain 'umbrias' of Cómpeta – super-steep schist slopes between 500 and 1000 metres altitude, with most at around 900m, in the Lugars of Monte Zorra, Loma de Archez, El Cigarrón, Jurcos and Arroya de la Mina.



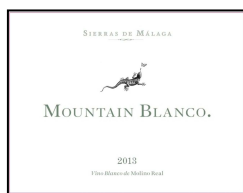
Telmo and Pablo's first wine from here was the 1998 Molino Real Mountain Wine. MR has been with us since the 2000 harvest. The dry wine, Mountain Blanco was first produced from the cosecha of 2009 and the first old barrel reserve bottling of 'Old Mountain' was 2005.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'Mountain Blanco' Dry Moscatel (or, how Telmo and Pablo saved Malaga from Hordes of Nords)

Mountain Blanco is a freedom fighter wine, designed to shield the old growers of the Málaga hills from sandal-wearing invaders from the north. McSwede holiday mansions are taking over the holiday hills of Málaga, exterminating the economy of peasant farmers and their vines in the process. In order to protect a few more growers from being bought out for the building of further tracts of tasteless holiday 'development' for shivering Swedes and Germans, Mountain Blanco was conceived. It's perhaps the toughest ask in winemaking: make a delicious, complete and compelling dry white wine from Moscatel in order to save more vineyards from the Scando-Sandal-Vandal set.

Mountain Blanco is a dry white selection of the mountain-top Moscatel from which Telmo and Pablo make their fabulous honeysuckle-and-schist sweet whites. It's hand-picked, organically grown, fermented with natural yeast in stainless and aged in tank 9 months. Grown in schist, it has great texture following from succulent fruit up front. The palate draws out and back to leanness and nerve by the tug of ultra-fine sandy tannin phenolics and gentle earthy acidity. It's earthy, grapey, spicy, floral and a perfect merge of fruit and soil. If terroir means anything to you, and you've had the extraordinary sweet Moscatels before for reference, this could only be from Málaga.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ Málaga Dry Moscatel 2013, Sierras de Málaga



The yellow-green nose is an electrifying interplay of mountain herbs, ejaculations of pollen, honeysuckle, menthol spice, shaley soil and honeycomb tracery. The palate leads briefly with Moscatel's floral-powder perfuminess but the slate soil takes over almost from the get-go and the resultant depth/length/texture is literally amazing. Tiny tart green grapes, poached white nectarine, wattle flowers, bramble and delicate spiced honeycomb succumb to deep, soft and fine mineral yellow soil aromatics.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'MR' Moscatel Málaga Mountain Wine 500ml

And so, to the Mountain Wines (the term is Telmo and Pablo's, not an official DO reference ... it does add a certain significance!). MR and Molino Real 'Mountain Wines' are grown on 9 hectares of vineyard between 350 and 1000 metres' altitude on crumbly, very steep schist (brown slate) slopes. There is no rot, just fabulously composed, very pure ripe fruit, coming off extremely old mountain bush vines meticulously restored by Telmo and Pablo. Fermented The fruit is picked ripe and then has a second maturation, the 'Asoleo' (literally, 'to the sun'), on 'Paseros' (drying racks) where the grapes are partially raisined before extraction via an old olive oil press. 2.5kg of fruit yields just 1 litre of must – half the yield of 'normal' wine.

The MR version, is a deliberately fresh style. After controlled drying for about a week, the wine is handled to avoid any oxidative blowout of fruit crunch and acid definition. Fermentation of chilled must takes place in stainless steel, and the wine is bottled without further work in order to retain fruit freshness and ripe, spicy-earthy acidity. Big sister Molino Real is fermented and then aged 20 months in new French oak barriques.

Gastronomically, they are handy with sweets of course – particularly relatively savoury desserts such as almond tart, and anything citric. The are even better with all forms of cheese, and can handle the acids on even the most out-there blues and goats' cheeses. They are great chilled as an afternoon drink, perhaps with grapes, fruits and nuts, and simply wonderful with pate/foie gras.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'MR' Mountain Wine 2012



The wine is fabulously pure, intense and long: golden-smelling, brimming with blossom, and edged with marmalade - all underpinned by fresh honeycomb and shale minerality. Full and soft, with fine acid providing drying cut at the finish, MR is not especially sweet, and has superbly complex texture with prominent expression of the soft brown slate soil.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'Molino Real' Mountain Wine 500ml

There are only tiny volumes of Molino Real Moscatel. This is the most concentrated old vine fruit of the Malaga hills, and has swallowed 20 months in new French barriques. The fruit is so good that the wood is virtually undetectable, save for an extra dimension of spicy, savoury structure tucked into the fruit richness.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'Molino Real' Mountain Wine 2009

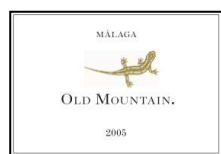


Green herbs, honeycomb, candied fruit, menthol-petroleum soil smells and extraordinary honeysuckle and spice. Small grapes are powerfully spiced, seasoned, rich and slippery. It's intense and liquorous without being overly sweet, with a lush finish on a broad, ripe citric acidity which will hold it in stead for many years.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'Old Mountain' Moscatel 375ml

Mature, complex and even less overtly sweet than Molino Real, with extraordinary honeysuckle-spice and complex volatile aromas, 'Old Mountain' is a single barrel from each harvest held in the bodega an extra 7 years, topped all the while with a little of each year's current harvest. It is one of the most incredible things I have ever drunk. Our annual allocation is just 3 half bottles. First release 2005 vintage.

TELMO RODRIGUEZ 'Old Mountain' 2005



All the complex volatile aromatics one would expect from a sweet wine aged 8 years in barrel. Intense, rindy marmalade with a touch of toffee glaze, a lash of spice and the slate of Cómpeeta wind through complex jar-preserved fruits in a wine of astonishing poise, depth and clarity despite the outrageous complexity. Better than perfect.