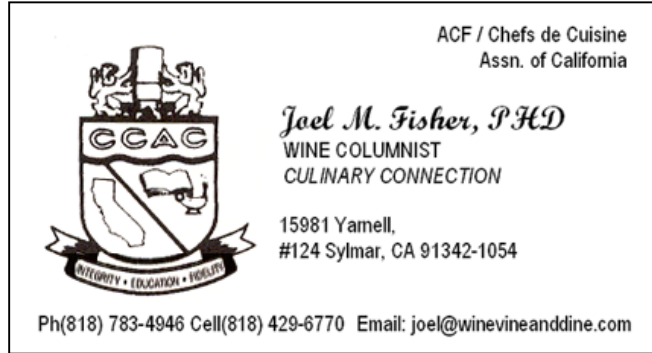


FROM THE GRAPEVINE

BY [JOEL M. FISHER](#)



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JOEL M. FISHER
with Sara Fisher-Chapin

One of the greatest pleasures of working in this community comes from meeting like-minded people. I don't mean people who have the same wine taste and preference as I do – which I admit is fun – but meeting people who are passionate about wine. So imagine how thrilled I was to be invited by Anthony Diaz Blue, wine editor for *Bon Appétit* magazine to join their tasting panel.

I recently attended my first event in their mid-city digs, where the goal of the day was to evaluate 25 Spanish wines. More than 20 of us invitees, many writers for other publications, filled the inviting space. Armed with multiple tasting glasses and note-taking tools, we plunged in.

We began with some Spanish bubbly. The *NV Castello Roig Brut Nature Cava, Penedès* (\$25) was pleasant and dry. More interesting was the *NV Castello Roig Rosada Cava, Penedès* (\$27), which is entirely made from the indigenous Tripat varietal and is the first 100% Tripat bottle to be imported into the U.S. We concluded this tasting section with the *2003 Castello Roig Seleccio Chardonnay/Xarel-Lo, Penedès*, (\$34) which is a blend of Chardonnay and 75-year-old Xarel-lo vines. Both of these offerings were quite distinct and well worth watching.

From sparkling to flat, we moved on to a flight of whites. I loved the *2004 Pazo Pondal Albarino, Rias Baixas* (\$27). It showed the typical Albarino floral nose, reminiscent of a great Riesling. The *2004 Ermita Veracruz Verdejo* (\$22) was also notable. Hailing from Rueda, it possessed a strong, citron nose and a long finish filled with citrus peel and spice.

Next up were the reds. The *2003 Solar De Randez Joven* (\$14) was a traditional Rioja, and the *2001 Solar De Randez Crianza* (\$21) was straightforward but good drinking. Equally simple but attractive was the *2003 Senorio De Valdehermoso Joven, Ribera del Duero* (\$17), with its deep color and cherry nose. The 2000 vintage of this same wine didn't fare as well – the nose was 'stinky'.

From the Penedès we sampled the *2001 Castello Roig Ull De Liebre/Merlot* (\$21), a well-structured blend with good fruits and soft tannins on the finish. I found the *2001 Castello Roig Seleccio Cabernet Sauvignon/Merlot* (\$34) to be exceptional. Powerful and focused, it showed flair. Dark black fruit exploded on the tongue, and ripe tannins unfurled slowly along with rich spices.

The last bottles from this segment were from the [Rejadorada](#) winery. Its ruby-red *2001 Toro* (\$61) had nice fruit on the nose, as well as delicious hints of licorice, spice, vanilla and coffee. The *2003 Tinto Roble, Toro* (\$22) was juicy and full-bodied, whereas their *2001 Crianza, Toro* (\$31) was more medium-bodied with lovely currant notes among mineral tannins.

We then moved to wines from the Navarra region. The products were quite different from what I usually expect of Spanish wines. The **Bodega Arteaga's** *2000 Crianza* (\$21) was just plain odd, with a green-herb nose. Better was the complex *1999 Reserva* (\$26), although the rich finish did have a disconcerting hint of potato. In a totally different league was the *2002 Alzania Seleccio Privada, Navarra* (\$92). Rated a 92 by Anthony, this "hot ticket" possessed great balance, good color and a lingering finish.

As far as I'm concerned, we wrapped up the tasting on a nice run of hits. I can't wait to drink the *2002 Pagos de Valdeorca, Rioja* (\$45) again. This strong wine flaunted beautiful garnet colors and a fascinating leather under-note. (I won't have to wait long; I hope to visit the bodega next summer on the 'Cuisine and Wines of Iberia' trip Daniel Drumlake and I are leading.) The next success was the graceful *2002 Valderiz* (\$45) from the Ribera del Duero area. I loved the coffee and fruit tones. Also of remarkable note was this bodega's *2000 Tomas Esteban* (\$140), a red wine deserving of high praise. This well-integrated wine was warmed with delightful toast, oak and tannins. Sadly, only 3,000 bottles were produced.

We continued our roll with the complex *2001 Sango De Rejadorada* (\$61), from the Toro region. The elegant bottle possessed a nice ruby color and aromas of berries and licorice. Next came the *2000 Coma Vella* (\$58). Derived from 30-year-old vines high in Priorat, this powerful – and alcoholic (14.5%) – wine showed good fruit forward.

And then the grand finale: the *2000 Clos Fonta Priorat* (\$105). This blend of Garnacha, Carignane and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes come from 60-year-old vines. Concentrated and potent, the wine will pair beautifully with red meats and chocolate. If you happen to find a bottle, grab it. Even at this price, they're going to disappear!

With that, I bid you and 2005 adieu. Have a very happy holiday.

Joel M. Fisher, Ph.D. has been Wine Instructor these past five years for the Culinary Arts Department, Art Institute of California Los Angeles He is Director of Public Affairs for Avalon Hollywood, and as a partner in WineVineandDine conducts wine tastings, wine dinners, and wine-and-food pairing throughout Southern California. **Sara Fisher-Chapin** has been a professional journalist and writer for over a decade. One of her earliest – and favorite – assignments was to cover the Tuscan wine country for Fodors LLC.