

CWW Visit June 2016
The Haciendas Company
Marqués de la Concordia



A small group of four CWW members travelled to Castilla y León in Spain as guests of the Haciendas Company's Marqués de la Concordia Family of Wines from 16th-18th June 2016. The reports below are by three of the team, while the photographs are by the fourth member, Andrew Barrow, unless otherwise stated.

The philosophy of farm to table

Angela Reddin sets the scene and offers some background information.

The Marqués de la Concordia Family of Wines is marketed under the umbrella of the Haciendas Company, which embraces not only a large number of wine brands, but also gastronomy, restaurants, and has a spirits' project underway.

Four members of the Circle were hosted at the Hacienda

Zorita Hotel and Spa, near Salamanca in Spain's Castilla y León region, to experience the 'soil to table' philosophy of this particular estate.

More gastronomy than wine tasting, it was rather unusual for us to taste only nine wines in total for the duration of our stay – Quentin Sadler details them in his report of the trip, while Tanya Mann covers the gastronomic highlights. Most of the wonderful photographs are by Andrew Barrow.

A potted history

There is plenty of history associated with the Hacienda Zorita Hotel and Dominican estate. The first written recordings date back to 1185. This date coincides with a quarrel among Spain's Catholic bishops regarding ownership rights to the farm. After members of the Spanish royal family either owned or spent summers there, the farm and buildings were eventually ceded to the Dominican Order in 1366.

Report produced by: The Circle Update team

Editor: Wink Lorch
wink@winklorch.com

Deputy editor: Robert Smyth
wordsmthy@gmail.com

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For more details about the Circle of Wine Writers, visit the website:
www.circleofwinewriters.org

For more information, please contact the administrator: Andrea Warren
Tel: +44 1753 882320
Email: andrea.warren@btinternet.com

Cover photograph: The tower of the Zorita Natural Reserve winery that overlooks the vineyards.

Photo by **Andrew Barrow**.

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Jaime Boville, vice president of the Haciendas Company, with his PR associates either side of him, introduces his cheese and wine samples to CWW members: Tanya Mann, on the left, and on right, Quentin Sadler and Angela Reddin.





The Hacienda then hosted professors from the renowned University of Salamanca and it was the Bishop of Salamanca who persuaded Christopher Columbus to delay his expedition and stay there in 1487. Columbus wanted to find an alternative passage via the spice road (discovered by Marco Polo) to China. The bishop was instrumental in persuading the monarchs to fund the trip.

From Christopher Columbus' letter to Fr. Diego de Deza. 21st December 1504:

"... and we must therefore honour Sir Bishop of Palencia (Fr. Diego de Deza) for, since I first stepped on Castile, he has looked after me and has always strived to give me the best of services. ... hence the Mighty King and Queen desired me to stay here and postponed my journey to the Indians as I was already sailing the sea."

Life continued at the Hacienda until the 19th century, an ugly time for religious communities all over Europe. In Spain, the ecclesiastical confiscations of Mendizábal (the imposed expropriation of religious orders' lands and property), basically meant that the religious orders were turfed out of all properties and farms. The rocky road of 19th century Spanish politics saw this first revoked, then repealed and once again imposed.

The main building for the Hacienda Zorita hotel, restaurant and the barrel room. The statue is of the Marqués de la Concordia.

The road to restoration

In 1939, the dictator General Franco came to power in Spain. After his death in 1975, Spain returned to a democracy. The Zorita estate was derelict by this time. The Haciendas Company acquired the site in 2004 and set about the sympathetic restoration of the whole wine farm estate. Hacienda Zorita became Spain's first luxury wine hotel and a member of Small Luxury Hotels of the World.

The so-called warehouse boasts a new wooden roof curved like the hull of a sailing ship and is ideal for events, weddings and so on. The rest of the buildings were also completely renovated and the hotel's public rooms now have some beautiful art pieces on show.

A statue in the forecourt is of the Marqués de la Concordia. The Marqués is one of Spain's most famous historical figures. Don José Abascal was granted this grand title in 1812 for his work in unifying the New World with the Old in the Americas, in his position of viceroy of Peru.

The 40-room hotel, warehouse, outbuildings and Moorish spa have all been incorporated into an eclectic whole. Standing apart, the Moorish building is a former flour

mill, which overlooks the River Tormes and now houses the spa and treatment room.

Vines and trees line the walkways to the outside rooms, some of which have river views. There are suites and family rooms, as well as rooms in the main building itself. The outbuilding bedrooms all have a semi-enclosed front garden, with sun lounge seating, providing a very tranquil setting. Out on the lawn there are two swimming pools situated in the greenery.

Bridge over the nearby River Tormes. Photo by Tanya Mann.





The philosophy

The owners and partners have a particular view of what they want to achieve: “We are men who share the same vision of the world we live in and the way we make our dreams come true. A globetrotter who always finds his way home; a winemaker that always thinks outside of the box and conquers the world with his magic potions; and lastly a food lover who arrived in the Duero Valley one day and never left again.”

The aim of this motley crew is to provide the hotel guests and visitors with a complete experience from soil to plate. A large organic kitchen garden supplies herbs and vegetables. They make their own pig products and cheeses, also a range of olive oils and soon to be released are a balsamic vinegar and a rum – the ‘Sister Isles rum project’. Other spirits are also being considered.

The organic farm counts over 300 hectares of oak trees surrounded by corn fields and meadows where the animals

roam freely. During our summer visit the pigs were being fed alternative feed as the acorns were not yet ready.

The rare Verata goat is happy here. So is the Hungarian Mangalica pig, which is distinctive with its long, very curly hair, but is also a mid-European cousin of Pata Negra Iberian pigs. Indigenous Churra sheep and African water buffaloes provide milk for the cheeses.

At the cheese making facility, they employ nature’s only way to preserve the food’s original nutrients, quality and flavour: Individual Quick Freezing (IQF). Historically, farmers, fishermen and hunters preserved their goods in unheated buildings during the winter season. IQF stops decomposition by inhibiting the growth of most bacterial species and does not require additives or preservatives as microorganisms do not grow when temperatures are below -9.5°C. At Zorita’s cheese creamery they use some pretty serious kit that runs at -35° C. Cheeses are made from raw ewe’s, goat and buffalo milks. Incidentally, they also eschew filtering in red wines.

The famous Ibérico pig gives the most wonderful jamón that any of us had ever tasted. Their Ibéricos are pure breed, free range and their diet consists of acorns and pasture grasses. The jamón is cured for 18 months.

They have an *acetaia* with a solera system for ageing their balsamic vinegars, which we tasted, going down in barrel size from two years old to the smallest barrel which



Top: A stork nests on the hotel roof; left: the balsamic vinegar ageing room; below: Tanya Mann’s photo of pigs at the farm.



was the 10-year-old. The process of evaporation means they will lose over three-quarters of the liquid in the ten years.

The not yet available 10-year-old was viscous, dark and thick enough to be treacle. Trying to stir the barrel took a lot of effort and the taste was incredibly sugary.

The three Zorita Musketeers

Jaime Boville is vice president of the Haciendas Company, as well as the brand ambassador and president of the Slow Food Duero Valley Association.

For nearly 20 years Jaime's professional life was in Madrid. First he worked in law, then in advertising and communication in which he founded and directed several companies and had an amateur relationship with wine and food.

In 2002 at an alumni celebration of Colegio del Pilar in Madrid, Jaime reconnected with **Victor Redondo** (owner of The Haciendas Company), a friend and classmate for 11 years, from 6 to 17 years old. Victor then introduced Jaime to his newly launched project, The Haciendas Company (THC).

Jaime then visited the various *haciendas* of the company in the Duero Valley: Ribera del Duero, Rueda, the Natural Reserve in Arribes del Duero and Salamanca, where he fell in love with the project.

Jaime was appointed president of the Slow Food Duero Valley Association in 2011.

For the last four years, Jaime has been working to help with the recovery of local species and varieties of extraordinary quality that are in danger of extinction because they are slow growth products, often with lower profitability compared to those used by the multinational food companies.

Carmelo Angulo is the master winemaker for all the Rioja wines. Winemaking took Carmelo from his home in Rioja Alta to almost every wine region in Spain: Rueda, Ribera del Duero, Arribes del Duero, Catalunya, Castilla y León and Castilla-La Mancha. He has an oenology degree from the Rovira i Virgili University in Tarragona and over 35 years of experience has made of him one of the country's most renowned winemakers.

Carmelo started his career at Federico Paternina where he spent 14 years. Incidentally, Paternina became part of the Marqués de la Concordia group in 2014. He has been working for United Wineries for the past 24 years, a

company that incorporates both Berberana's and Marqués de la Concordia's respective portfolios of wines. He was a pioneer in using new oak barrels for short-ageing single varietal Tempranillo wines, and one of the only people in the region to be authorised to experiment with the international grape varieties (Syrah, Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot).

Victor Redondo gained the financial backing of a private capital group in 2015 and intends to bring the Hacienda Zorita's Kitchen brand to new sites worldwide. In these establishments they will market premium wines from Spain's finest wine regions, including Rioja, Ribera del Duero, Rueda, Arribes del Duero and Andalucía. They will also offer their award-winning premium cheeses, Ibérico pig products, olive oil and balsamic vinegars produced on its 300-hectares organic farm.

As part of further growth initiatives, THC is planning the launch of a premium rum project in partnership with an established Caribbean producer. They also intend to take the Madrid Warehouse online shopping facility and the Zorita Restaurant project and spirits bar to London and other cities worldwide.

Quentin Sadler gives his thoughts on the Concordia wines.

We had a wonderful time, but it wasn't a typical wine visit in many ways, because we didn't actually taste very much wine. According to my notes we tried nine different wines over the three days, and some of those were imbibed in the relaxed atmosphere with meals rather than the official tastings.

Marqués de la Concordia Family of Wines produce a great deal of wine and own a great many wine estates and brands. The Marqués de la Concordia wines from Rioja are where it all began for them, but over the years they have added other brands to their roster, such as Lagunilla, Federico Paternina, Viña Alarde and the venerable Bodegas Rioja Santiago in Rioja. Marqués de Monistrol in Catalunya gives them their Cava arm, while Ándalus, their Andalusian outpost, gives them a blank canvas and the ability to experiment – we got to taste the exciting Ándalus Petit Verdot, the first one from Andalucía. More recently they have added the well-respected Marqués de Griñon wines from both Toledo and Rioja. Finally, there are the wines



The Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve vineyard viewed from the winery tower; HZ12, a Ribera del Duero wine from the Marqués de la Concordia line-up.



from the Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve wine estate in Arribes del Duero, close to the group's Hacienda Zorita headquarters and which we were to visit.

The beautiful Hacienda Zorita Wine Hotel & Spa, where we stayed, is a wonderful part of the world. The River Tormes flows right by the Hacienda before winding the 40 or so kilometres to the border with Portugal where it flows into the Duero/Douro at Fermoselle in Arribes del Duero.

We visited the nearby Hacienda Zorita Organic Farm, where we tasted their fabulous cheeses and the very best Spanish ham that I have ever eaten. They produce superb olive oil there too, as do many of their wine estates.

The Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve wine estate is in the wonderfully wild and unspoilt Arribes del Duero Natural Park, which also covers the Douro Valley over the border in Portugal. At 70 hectares of vines, it's a big estate in a land of co-operatives and tiny producers. They certainly seem to have started something. Their first vintage was in 2004 when the region was a lowly *Vino de la Tierra* and by 2007 the DO Arribes had been created.

Unlike their neighbours they decided not to use Juan García, the traditional local grape, but instead to concentrate on Tempranillo. Under advice from viticulturalist Richard Smart, they also opted to plant Syrah, and while this is not permitted in the local DO, it seems to perform very well indeed.

The vineyard is named in honour of Miguel de Unamuno, who was a great writer and philosopher of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He was rector of Salamanca University and travelled widely in the Duero Valley, writing about his journeys and experiences. The Unamuno vineyard name only appears on the labels of the more prestigious wines, such as the Syrah.

The Hacienda Zorita name is also used for their two other wineries in Castilla y León: The Vega-Reina vineyard in Rueda and the

Abscal vineyard in Ribera del Duero, which is next to Vega Sicilia.

A selection to taste

As I say, we didn't taste many of the group's wines, but there were some good things among the ones we did try. The wines that stood out for me were:

Marqués de la Concordia MM Reserva de la Familia Rosado Brut Cava. This 70% Pinot Noir and 30% Monastrell sparkling blend was aged for 48 months on the lees. This is an elegant and refined Cava that we got to drink twice and both times I liked the fine mousse, the delicate shortbread richness and the taut texture.

2013 Marqués de Monistrol Selección Especial Brut Cava is another good quality, small production Cava that has a fine mousse, fresh stone fruit and nutty flavours.

2015 Vega de la Reina, DO Rueda, is a blend of 95%

Verdejo and 5% Sauvignon Blanc. The Sauvignon adds some zing to this pretty rich, textured and creamy Rueda. I enjoyed this very much, but I feel it is a food wine, so I was pleased to see that they also produce a lighter, zingy, easy drinking Verdejo under the Hacienda Zorita label.

2012 Marqués de Concordia HZ12 Crianza, DO Ribera del Duero, is a massive, very modern take on Ribera del Duero. It is rich and concentrated with a powerful streak of umami-like olive bitterness that balances the powerful ripe fruit.

2009 Marqués de Concordia Reserva, DO Ca Rioja, is a very seductive style of Rioja, very supple with polished, velvety tannins and lots of smoke, tobacco and vanilla oak. It's very attractive stuff, like a sort of New World-style Rioja.

2006 Ándalus Á Petit Verdot, Vino de Mesa de Andalucía, is produced at the Cortijo Las Monjas estate near Ronda and is a rich, concentrated and mocha-infused wine that is

developing slowly. We tried it at dinner with some lamb and it worked very well.

My star wine though was the **2011 Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve Syrah, Unamuno vineyard, Vino de la Tierra Castilla y León** – as Syrah is not permitted in the DO Arribes. This 100% Syrah was aged for 18 months in a mixture of French and American oak barrels and it has great concentration and balance, lovely fruit, tingly spice and well-judged oak – a really good effort and all the better for being unexpected.

As you can see, this is quite an outfit with a lot going for it and I look forward to seeing how the wines progress over time.

Without which no press trip is complete: a visit to the bottling line.



Tanya Mann peruses the gastronomic delights at the 'Pentagon' of the Haciendas Company and loses her heart to a Syrah.

When we read the words 'wine resort' we imagine trips around wineries and relaxing wine spas. Where can you go if you would like more than this? Hacienda Zorita!

The 'Pentagon' of the Haciendas Company is a fully-fledged complex of oenogastronomic delights. Beginning with the joint participation of a few wineries, there is now a resort, a spa and a cellar that looks like a stage setting for an exotic opera, with a VIP dining area, and, to cater for our other appetites, an organic farm where they produce vegetables, plus high-end, well-matured balsamic vinegar, cheese and mouth-watering jamón. Believe me, even if you think that Spanish jamón is fatty and unpleasant, this product will convert you; it is a gastronomic pearl, more addictive than cigarettes (I hope you don't smoke) or oysters.

the best technology and the special maturation process in an impeccable space, as clean as an operating theatre, with controlled temperature levels (8°C) at 85% humidity. As for the balsamic vinegars, these are also treated like wines. As they evaporate over the years, they are moved to progressively smaller different wood barrels, where they develop more sweet and dried fruit flavours, passing through a stage of nuttiness (only achieved after five years in cask) until it reaches, at ten years, the reward worth waiting for: a concentrated nectar reminiscent of Christmas cake! We tried it with strawberries, with the balsamic vinegar used instead of cream. It worked beautifully.

On this trip I received a good idea from Duarte Cunha, who is the general manager of Hacienda Zorita Hotel and Spa. He described how nowadays tourists choose to visit not just one region, but try to find roots, themes and variations, which may take them from one country to another. In this case Salamanca has a perfect position, so the wine tourist



This was the most relaxing trade trip that I have made in 16 years of working in the wine business. There were no obscure discussions of pH and acidity levels or other niceties of chemistry. Here the chemistry comes from the people who work in this marvellous project.

For example, the vice president, Jaime Boville Garcia de Vinuesa, to give him his full name, who discusses his cheese with such a passion that you long to try anything that he recommends, especially the cheese aged in Syrah wine or thyme for six months. This proved an inspired idea to treasure, with the flavour of the cheeses straight away changing the taste and texture of 'big' Spanish wines with great subtlety.

Jaime explains that the success of Hacienda Zorita's wonderful farm cheese depends on three factors: the best milk,



The Hacienda Zorita farm's aged balsamic vinegar, tasted with strawberries (photo by Tanya Mann); a sampling of the farm's elusive jamón and other pork produce, together with a selection of cheese.

can head off to Madrid or venture further into the vineyards of Portugal.

I for one will definitely return, to sample again the peace that gives you an audience with yourself and your thoughts. And that is all you need to write the perfect book about wine.

That Syrah, again

Among the different styles of wines produced by The Haciendas Company from their many wineries, my heart was won over by a product from a winery only 20 minutes from the Portuguese border, where a woman winemaker,

Circle of Wine Writers Marqués de la Concordia visit, June 2016

Alma Garcia, makes an extraordinary Syrah. I am not normally inspired by Syrah wines but this time I decided that of all the wines I sampled, the 2011 Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve Syrah, Unamuno Vineyard, is the one deserving of more detailed consideration.

Almost every wine region is trying to find a terroir that is friendly to Syrah, but I find it very difficult to find anything arresting in the new Syrah style after tasting the iconic Syrahs from the Old and New World. So it's lovely to find a memorable wine from this region. I wanted to find the typical Syrah characteristics: the notes of tobacco and red berries, and here not too far from Salamanca I found a very ambitious example of what I was looking for. It is made by a woman, but in a bold male-style; the berries had been harvested at the ideal level of ripeness, and there was an excellent fruit component, which was complemented by refreshing acidity. The tannins were perfectly integrated. There is an amazing feeling in the mouth and the expected similar power on the palate. This wine is still very young. We tasted the 2011 (24 months in new French oak), and now dream of trying more vintages. The 2015 will be available soon and it was an excellent vintage, so do not miss it!



Above: The memorable 2011 Unamuno Vineyard Syrah from the Hacienda Zorita Natural Reserve winery, made by winemaker, Alma Garcia, pictured above right. Below: The entrance to the Hacienda Zorita hotel.

*Next page/back cover: The CWW group in the midst of studious tasting in the Zorita Natural Reserve winery tower. Photo by **Andrew Barrow**.*



Thanks from us all

To conclude, this was certainly a trip with a difference. The ethos of the company, its drive for perfection and control over the products, 'from soil to plate and glass' was exemplary.

We would like very much to thank Sophiya Hussain from Touch PR and Alejandra, our liaison with the Haciendas Company, for taking such good care of us. We sometimes forget how much work and effort it is to organise a press trip like this and to keep everything running smoothly.

